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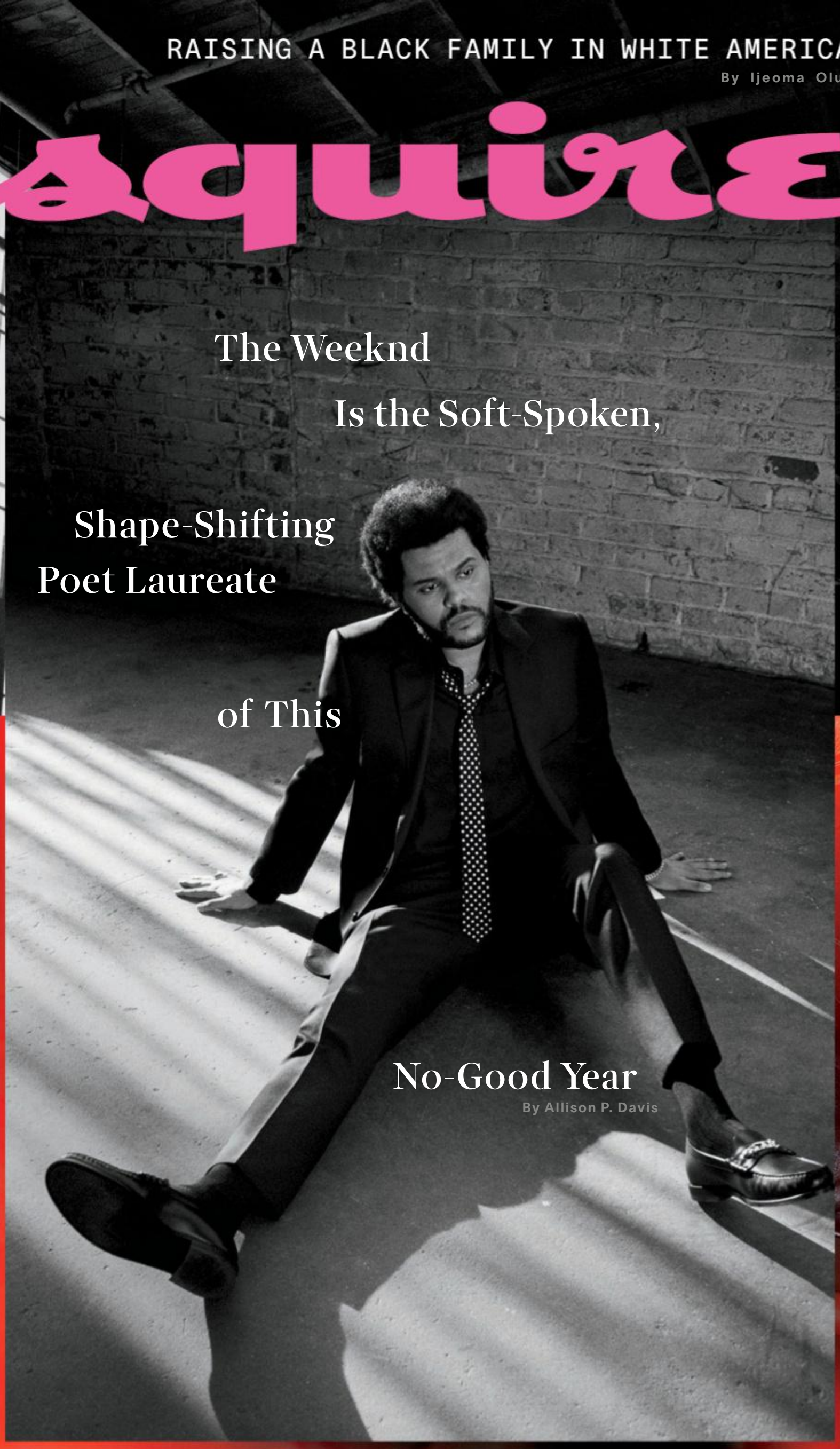
By Ijeoma Oluo

Esquire

The Weeknd Is the Soft-Spoken, Shape-Shifting Poet Laureate of This No-Good Year

By Allison P. Davis



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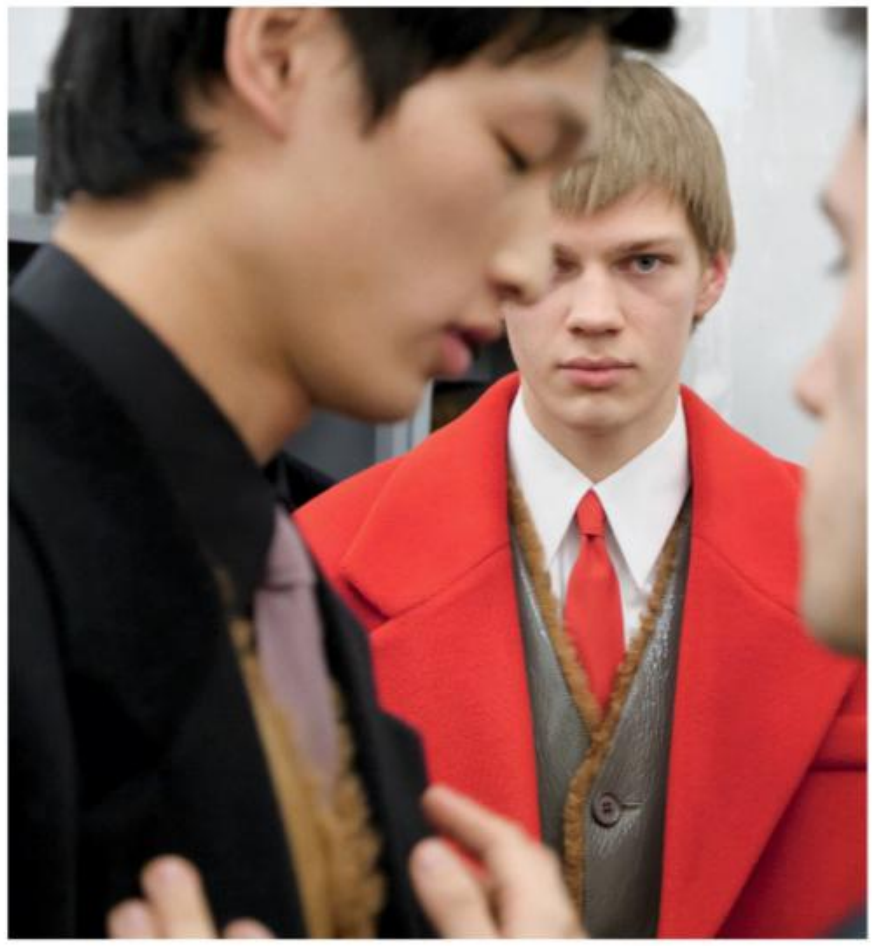

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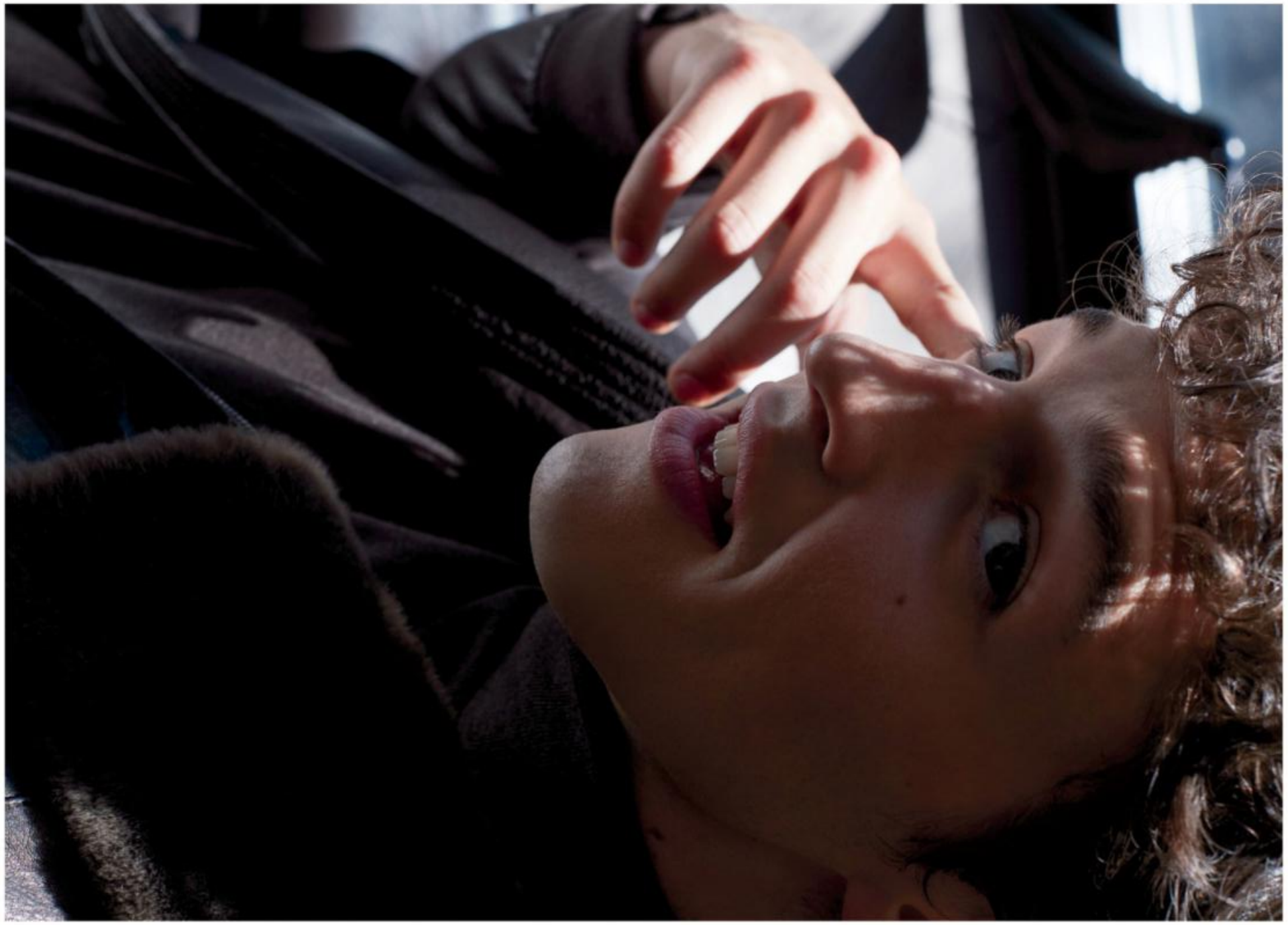

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
SEPTEMBER 2020

24 EDITOR'S LETTER

THE SHORT STORIES

27 Eighteen reasons to love getting dressed again; a jacket that's as comfortable as your favorite T-shirt; the waistband makes a big comeback; a fast watch with a long history; your ideal late-summer backyard setup; and the season's best new music.

FEATURES

52 ONE DAY HE'LL UNDERSTAND
by Ijeoma Oluo
I dread a future for my older son in which people fail him, and a future for my younger son in which systems fail him.

56 "I'M MARTIN SHEEN, I'M STEVE McQUEEN, I'M JIMMY DEAN . . ."
There's never been a better time to embrace the basics. Because iconic American looks never go out of style.

64 POP STAR FOR THE DEMON HOURS
by Allison P. Davis
Abel Tesfaye, aka the Weeknd, provides the soundtrack for our fucked-up times.

72 DRAINED
by Mychal Denzel Smith
If America continues to whitewash Black icons, then maybe it's time to set aside those icons.

74 INTO THE STORM
by Julian Smith
For the first hours of Hurricane Harvey's assault on Houston, three years ago this August, one young Coast Guard crew was the only help in the sky.

"Nothing could stop you from trying to go see that person, because you're so lonely."
—THE WEEKND, PAGE 64

JACKET BY **OFF-WHITE C/O VIRGIL ABLOH;** TROUSERS AND LOAFERS, **CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE;** HAT, HIS OWN.

82 THE LONG SHOT
by Charles P. Pierce
Jaime Harrison, a young Black Democrat, has emerged as a threat to unseat Senator Lindsey Graham in South Carolina—and maybe to upend history itself.

86 MODFATHERS
by Gerald Flores
With LV², Virgil Abloh and Nigo have teamed up to create a new level of casual luxury.

92 THE OUTSIDERS
Some of the sharpest guys we know, in their own backyards.

102 SEVEN MAYORS, THREE CRISES, ONE TEXT THREAD
by Jack Holmes
A brotherhood of Black mayors talk on a group chat. Now more than ever, the conversations are a lifeline.

108 ESQUIRE ENDORSES
Embrace transition lenses.

AN OLD READ FOR NOW

Yes, it came out 50 years ago, but it's as relevant as ever. *Vibration Cooking: Or, the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl,* by Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, is sort of a cookbook, sort of a memoir, sort of a manifesto. Ultimately this 1970 milestone in American food writing—packed with chapters such as "Birth, Hunting and Gator Tails" and "Forty Acres and a Jeep," studded with loosely bare-bones recipes for dishes like pound cake, succotash, and smothered rabbit—is a spirited guide for getting through this thing called life. *—Jeff Gordinier*

ON THE COVER

THE WEEKND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JERALD JOHNSON. CASTING BY RANDI PECK. STYLING BY MATTHEW HENSON. PRODUCTION BY ZACH CRAWFORD AT CRAWFORD & CO PRODUCTIONS. SET DESIGN BY WARD ROBINSON AT WOODEN LADDER. GROOMING BY CHRISTINE NELLI USING LA MER AT THE WALL GROUP. HAIR BY DARONN CARR AND LALA. JACKET, SHIRT, TROUSERS, TIE, AND LOAFERS, CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE.

THE OTHER DAY, I GOT DRESSED for the first time in months. I put on jeans, a knit polo from the designer Brett Johnson, and a pair of shoes that wasn't the dirty white Vans I'd been wearing for months. I even went to the office. It felt good. Refreshing. Cold, in fact. The air-conditioning at the Esquire office in Manhattan was cranked so high I threw on a cashmere sweater pilfered from our fashion closet. The simple act of getting dressed was transformative, despite the fact that I saw practically nobody inside the empty office.

I hope the style pages in this issue—all of which were shot with strict social-distancing protocols—inspire you to get dressed, too. Even if, like the subjects of our feature on page 92, for which we photographed ten sharp-dressed men in their backyards, it's only to take a coffee or a cocktail to your small patch of grass or concrete. If you do, I think you'll find, as I did, that putting on clothes—the shirts and pants and shoes that help define your personal style—allows you to shed some of the existential dread we're all feeling. For a little while.

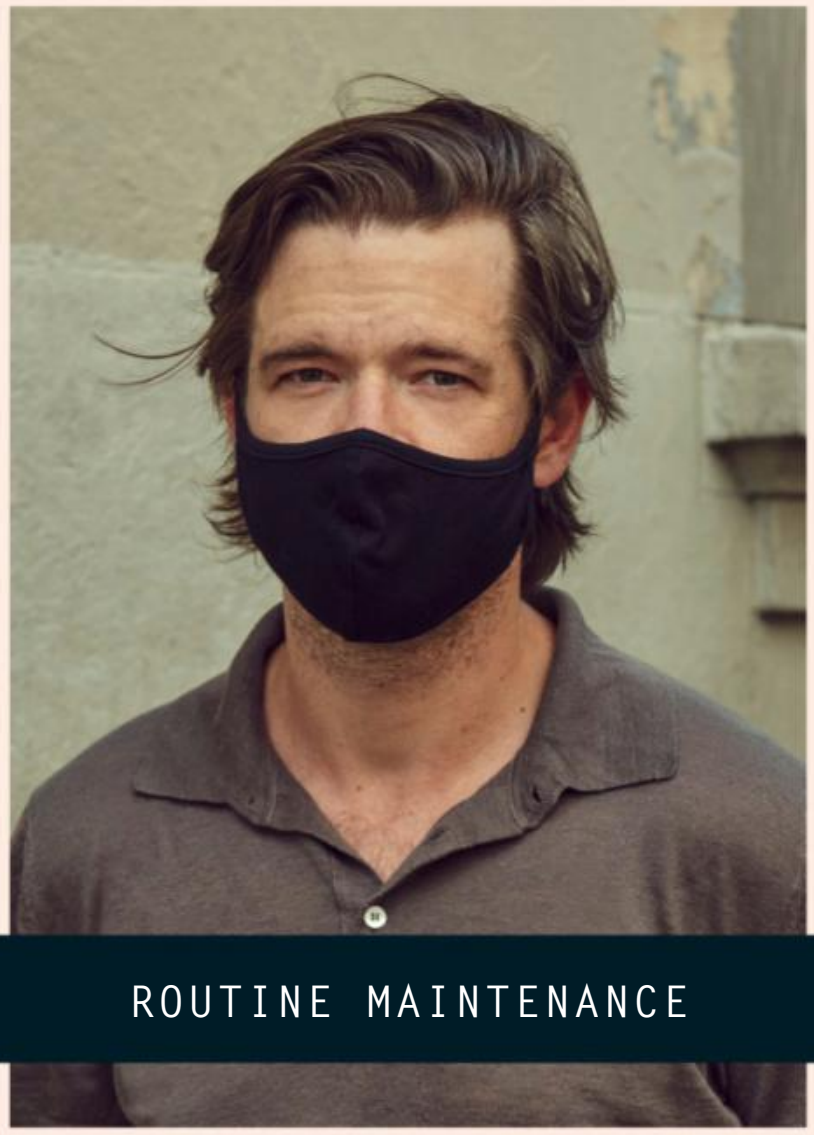
When I returned home from the office that day, it was my turn to put our five-year-old, Stella, to bed. This is an elaborate process that can last up to an hour and involves reading books, singing songs, back scratching, listening to lullaby renditions of popular music, and finally, with the precision of Tom Cruise catching a bead of sweat as it drops from his forehead, carrying her from our room to her own bedroom, where her nearly two-year-old sister is already asleep. It's intense. That night, in the middle of this routine, Stella cut me off mid-song and asked one of those questions that put a fissure in a parent's heart: "Is Santa Claus going to get sick?"

Talking to kids about [*gestures broadly*] all of this is one of the innumerable things we're dealing with nowadays. It's relatively minor, considering that more than 150,000 people in the U.S. have now died from COVID-19, millions are out of work, and protesters are getting beaten and snatched, detained without cause, by unidentified federal agents. But it makes me angry. Not at her, of course. At the people in charge. Our elected leaders, from the White House on down, who left us unprepared, who have stumbled through their inept response to historic crises and failed to unite us as a country.

As we were planning this issue, I asked my editors for a declarative piece on leadership, a loud essay calling out our leaders, demanding better. What they offered instead was a remarkable story about seven American mayors, all of them Black men in their thirties or forties, all but one presiding over cities that were once part of the Confederacy. They're united through a text-message chain—not unlike the one you share with your friends and family—in which they seek advice, solace, and humor. The story of these men (by Jack Holmes, on page 102) provides insight into the nearly impossible decisions they have to make about COVID-19, statues, demonstrations, policing, and politics. It also provides hope. These mayors aren't perfect. But they're thoughtful about the problems they face. They're human. And they're doing the work.

Back home in New York, when Stella asked about Santa Claus, I let out the labored sigh every parent knows. The one that buys you just a moment to find an answer. "Well," I said, our apartment's window unit whirring in the distance, "he has a pretty strong immune system from all those years of travel, so I think he'll be all right. And anyway, he's been through worse." She nodded and rolled over as I resumed the second verse of "My Favorite Things."

—**Michael Sebastian**



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take it easy: italian style

THE Sportstars

STILL THINK SUITS HAVE TO BE STIFF? IN CANALI'S HANDS, THAT JACKET IS JUST AS COMFORTABLE AS YOUR FAVORITE T-SHIRT.

BY NICK SULLIVAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTIAN HOGSTEDT

EVEN BEFORE A PANDEMIC-INDUCED WORK-FROM-HOME WARDROBE turned us all into connoisseurs of casual wear, able to sniff out the slight shift in bouquet between a simple sweatpant and a true *lounge* pant, the trend toward dressing down had been going strong for decades. Americans usually get the credit (blame?) for that, but well ahead of the advent of Casual Friday (and then Casual Every Day), some of Italy's sharpest dressers were already leaning all the way into taking it easy. It's not exactly the same, of course, but swap T-shirts for almost impossibly lightweight jackets and you'll get the idea. From the days of buttoned-up bella figura, Italian tailors, spearheaded by the godfather of it all, Vincenzo Attolini in Naples, experimented with the structure of the suit to make it more comfortable and less rigid as early as the 1930s.

styling tip

DON'T OVERTHINK IT: JEANS, JACKET, DESERT BOOTS, AND YOU'RE SET.

Later, as ready-to-wear options replaced bespoke garments, those lighter takes on officewear became available off the rack and around the world, making a name for "Made in Italy" in ever-widening circles. And in the past 20 or so years, a constant drive to lighten things up has allowed us to pile on the layers without piling on the pounds.

Canali is a perfect example of that evolution of Italian style. It was founded in Milan in 1934 as a suit maker. But as Milan cemented itself as a global fashion capital in the '60s, Canali saw a golden opportunity to introduce outerwear and establish the family name as a fully fledged brand, offering options for your entire wardrobe. Applying artisanal skills on an industrial scale became the lasting Italian business model for men's wear.

In the early aughts, Canali pioneered a capsule line of jackets reflecting a new taste for semiformal clothes that looked business appropriate but felt to the wearer like a cardigan, which meant you could pair a Kei jacket, as it was called, as easily with jeans as with a shirt and tie. Kei (as in *K* for *knit*) was originally a single unstructured blazer, but the program has expanded to include suits, trousers, and even overcoats, all subtly updated each season and all, like that initial jacket, designed to balance sartorial rigor with effortless comfort.

In other words, you've got no excuse not to step it up—at least a little. That Life Is Good tee has seen better days. Maybe it's time to try *la dolce vita*.

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HOW I EARNED IT

NMG NETWORK FOUNDER JASON CUTINELLA MAINTAINS HIS DETERMINATION IN AN UNPREDICTABLE WORLD

Amid Hawaii's plashing waves and sunny shores, a new kind of media company has arisen. Starting a little over a decade ago as the publisher of Chinatown Newspaper, an urban rag for Honolulu's downtown district, NMG Network now boasts a video, digital, social and print network reaching millions of people across multiple platforms. NMG founder Jason Cutinella takes a moment to sip Knob Creek® and talk with Esquire about how he turned grit into success—and how he remains steadfast and dedicated, even in uncertain times.

"The minute this epidemic started, I came to work and did exactly what I do every day," says Jason. "Nothing stopped my drive." As a result, the NMG team has weathered the pandemic with remarkable grace. In fact, for Jason, this unpredictable era feels oddly familiar—he founded his company in the wake of the 2008 downturn, so he knows a thing or two about tenacity amid turmoil. "People ask me all the time, 'Are you okay? How's it going?' And they don't realize that, to be honest, this feels exactly like when I started my business. I feel like I'm starting all over again." He's got the same sense of strong-willed purpose, but now he's doing it with accolades, strong partners and a killer team behind him.

Jason drinks Knob Creek® because he sees something familiar in the distillery's dogged attention to details. "We're like 'small batch' for the media industry. Knob Creek® prides themselves on the smallest things. If you look at a Knob Creek® bottle, man, there's so much going on. The attention to detail, inside and out,

"WE'RE LIKE 'SMALL BATCH' FOR THE MEDIA INDUSTRY."

is insane. NMG is like that. Our close consideration of every aspect of our creative is crazy."

Jason's ready-for-anything attitude is evident in every aspect of his life—from his affordable rent to his casual garb. Indeed, his daily "uniform" of sneakers, a blue-collar shirt, baseball cap and jeans belie the fact that Jason helms one of Hawaii's most prominent media empires. "I'm the least flashy guy you'll ever meet," he says with a laugh. "If you look at me, I look like I would go work at a whiskey distillery, not a multimedia company executive."

In the end, this practical approach to life, paired with hard work and meticulousness, has given Jason the opportunity to settle in with a nightly whiskey and rest on his laurels. "My approach to selling luxury media is hands-on—and sometimes that means getting dirty." He laughes, adding, "I busted my ass for 10 years, and I'm still doing it."

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styling tip

FORGET WHAT YOU WERE TOLD—WHITE SOCKS GO WITH EVERYTHING NOW.

Let's face it: You've been coddling your feet

By AVIDAN GROSSMAN

WHETHER WE'RE SHUFFLING around in house shoes or dipping out in sandals or sneakers, our day-to-day lives haven't demanded much in the way of non-cushy footwear recently. Well, fall is here, and whatever weird, wild world awaits us, you should step into it wearing the right shoes.

Slippers don't belong outside. Sandals have a built-in seasonal expiration date. And over the past few years, the constant grind of the sneaker release cycle has given way to a sense of fatigue. We've all got way more serious shit to worry about than taking an L on the latest Mad Lib of a sneaker collab. So allow me to introduce what I'll be wearing the most in post-lockdown life, a new go-to as versatile as any sneaker but better suited to this moment: the sturdy black hard-bottom, a shoe that knows what it is and doesn't pretend otherwise.

If you're expecting these bad boys to be comfy-cozy right out of the box, you're in for a dose of reality. But that's kind of the point. Black hard-bottoms are shoes—real, grown-up shoes—fit for the dawn of a new order. Wear 'em with slim, stonewashed jeans and a low-key black blazer. Wear 'em with a raggedy tee tucked into cropped work pants. Wear 'em with cuffed flannel trousers and a big, bold cardigan. Basically, wear 'em as often as possible, because the more beat-up they get, the better they're going to look and feel. (Though leather conditioner, shoe trees, and the occasional polish will help extend their life expectancy.)

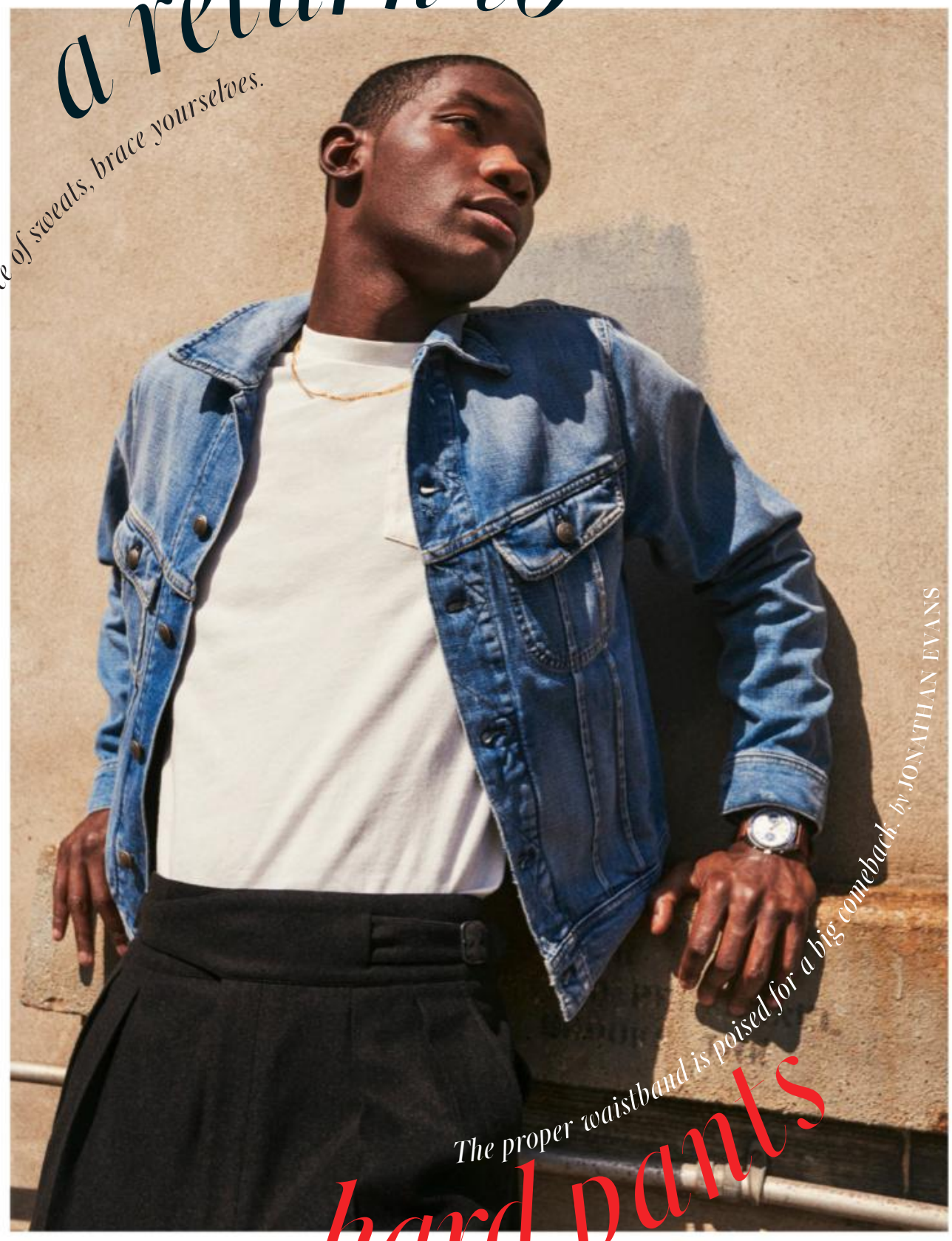
The revolution is coming, my friends, and it's going to start from the feet up. If you're ready to take on the world, these are the shoes to wear while you do it.

SHOES ($850) BY **CHURCH'S;** TROUSERS ($340) BY **SLOWEAR INCOTEX;** SOCKS ($18) BY **JOCKEY.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN HOGSTEDT

a return to hard pants

After months in the soft embrace of sweats, brace yourselves. The proper waistband is poised for a big comeback. by JONATHAN EVANS



PARAPHRASING A CLASSIC NEWTONIAN NUG-get might help us get at what's happening with trousers nowadays: "For every waistband action, there is an equal and opposite waistband reaction." In other words, the era of soft pants has, inevitably, given rise to the golden age of the waistband.

Just think about it. After months of you languishing indoors in sweatpants, that elasticated waist feels played out. Now it's time to not just put on clothes but *get dressed again*. What better way to make it feel real than to step into a proper pair of trousers with a waistband to match? We're talking tab fronts. We're talking buttons galore. We're talking feats of sartorial engineering like the Gurkha waistband, with its strap-and-buckle closure that makes going to the bathroom an adventure but looks so damn cool that it's worth the hassle.

One thing to keep in mind: Wearing pants like these doesn't mean you need to turn your entire look on its head. In fact, the best way to keep these types of trousers from veering into grandfatherly territory is to wear them as you wore those trusty sweatpants. Throw on a tee and a trucker instead of a shirt and tie. Try them with a big sweater or even a sweatshirt. (Hey, no one wants to give up sweats entirely.) Maybe skip the sneakers (see page 32), but don't get too literal about "equal and opposite." This isn't an about-face, just a change in direction. Newton may have chanced his way into explaining a modern waistband phenomenon, but you shouldn't take all your style advice from the guy in the powdered wig and breeches.

JACKET ($895) AND TROUSERS ($695) BY **RALPH LAUREN;** T-SHIRT ($88) BY **LEVI'S VINTAGE CLOTHING;** NECKLACE ($350) BY **TOM WOOD;** GRANDRALLY WATCH ($495) BY **ZODIAC.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN HOGSTEDT

ALSO, A WORD ON HARD SHORTS

Everyone needs at least one pair of shorts to kick around in. I have four: denim cut-offs, ultra-pink Patagonia Baggies, navy-blue J. Crew dock shorts, and a new addition this summer, Gurkha shorts from Suitsupply. They're unusual. Pleated and high-waisted, with a closure that involves a built-in belt on either side of the waist, getting them on and off can be a struggle. But they're durable. They get their name from the Gurkha regiments, fierce Nepalese soldiers who have fought for the British army since the 1800s, including in both world wars. The closures on the waist were meant to help these fighting men keep their shorts up after the deprivations of a long tour. Today, they're ideal for hauling my children around amid sweltering summer heat and a deadly pandemic. The secret is not to take them too seriously: I pair them with a beat-up T-shirt—preferably tie-dye—and dirty white Vans. Perfect for a long tour at the park.
—Michael Sebastian

COURTESY BANANA REPUBLIC (ILLUSTRATION)

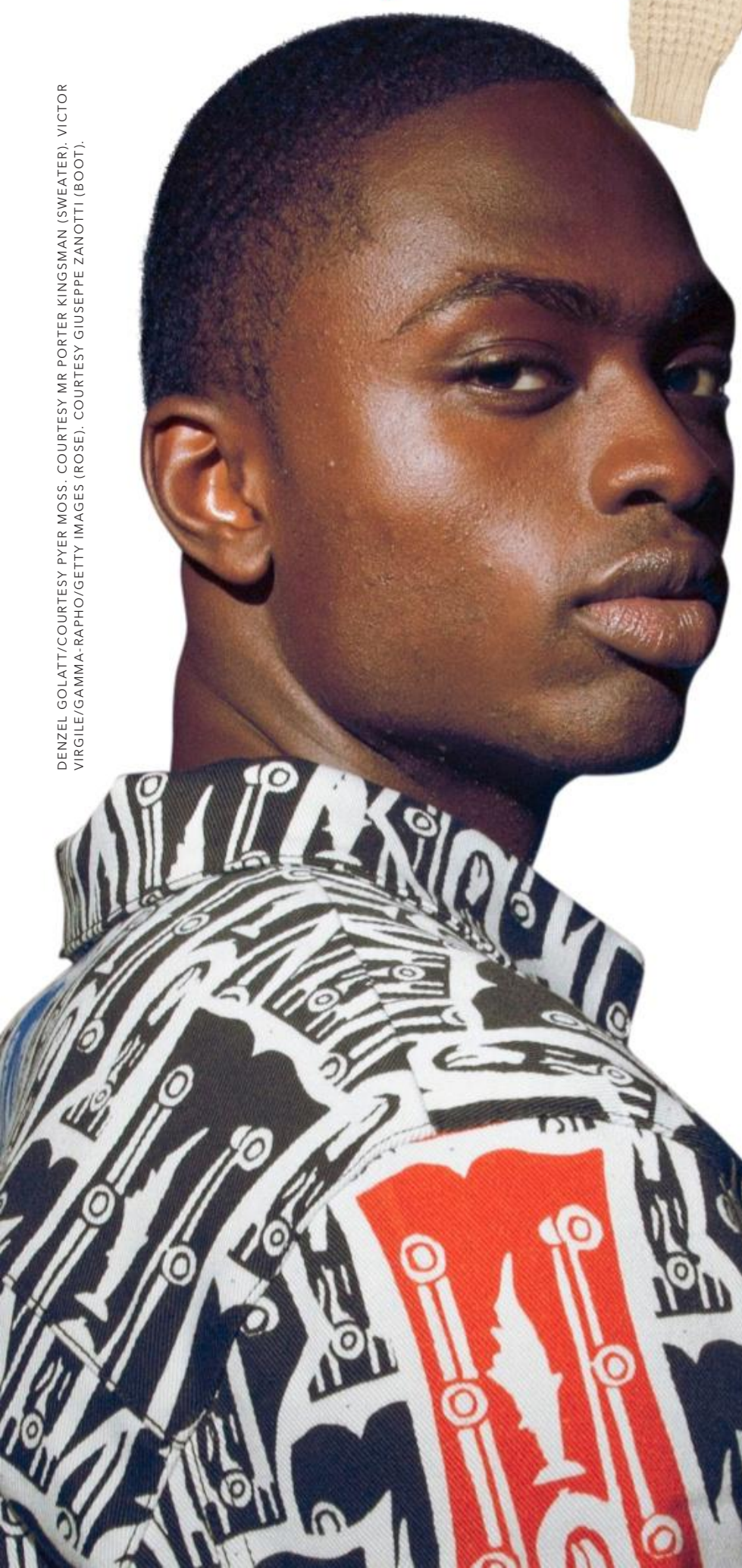
Reasons to Fall in Love with Getting Dressed Again

1

Small but not exactly subtle accessories, from **avant-garde earrings** to **intricately detailed rings** worn by the bunch.

2

THE RELEASE OF *AMERICAN, ALSO*, A DOCUMENTARY CHRONICLING THE TWO-YEAR LEAD-UP TO THE STUNNING SPRING/SUMMER 2020 PYER MOSS FASHION SHOW HONORING SISTER ROSETTA THARPE, THE INVENTOR OF ROCK 'N' ROLL.



3

Raf at Prada.

4

Enjoying knitwear at its most functional. Let there be cold, and not just that of the air conditioner. Bring on the big sweaters.

SWEATER ($635) BY **KINGSMAN,** MRPORTER.COM.

5

Martine Rose's impeccably executed gun-check topcoat. (For more on the pattern, see page 40.)

6

Cuban-heeled boots, for a little more height and a lot more vibe.

BOOTS ($1,250) BY **GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI.**

DENZEL GOLATT/COURTESY PYER MOSS. COURTESY MR PORTER KINGSMAN (SWEATER). VICTOR VIRGILE/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES (ROSE). COURTESY GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI (BOOT).

7

Contentious Proposition No. 1: Wear a tie to your job. It will confuse everyone, but it's so alien that it might just work.

TIE ($205) BY **LIVERANO & LIVERANO,** THEARMOURY.COM.

8

Contentious Proposition No. 2: Pop your collar. What once said "pretentious" now says "easygoing"—or at least "artfully audacious"—if deployed correctly.

9

Vintage-inspired jeans from **Glenn's Denim,** which combine Glenn Liburd's mastery of denim construction with fits that pay homage to N.Y.C.'s subcultural heyday of the '70s and '80s.

10

Simple, monochromatic dressing. The look—easier said than done—telegraphs a less conspicuous kind of luxury that favors texture and proportion over big, brash logos.

11

The new vintage boom, which is turning real rarity—not just manufactured scarcity—into clout.

12

ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE BLACK IN FASHION COUNCIL (LED BY SANDRINE CHARLES AND LINDSAY PEOPLES WAGNER) AND EFFORTS LIKE THE FIFTEEN PERCENT PLEDGE (LED BY AURORA JAMES), WHICH AIM TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM IN FASHION AND GET MORE SHELF SPACE DEVOTED TO BLACK-OWNED BRANDS.

THIS PAGE: COURTESY THE ARMOURY (TIE). COURTESY GLENN'S DENIM. JACK MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES (BYRNE). COURTESY RAG PARADE. GRACE MILLER (JAMES). DARREL HUNTER (WAGNER). COURTESY BFA (CHARLES). OPPOSITE: FLORENCE SULLIVAN (BRIEFCASE). ALLIE HOLLOWAY (JERSEY SUIT). COURTESY SEIKO. ESTROP/GETTY IMAGES (DALEY). COURTESY DARRYL BROWN.

Going DIY by **chopping the collar off a denim shirt** or **distressing the cuffs and hem of a lightweight sweater.** It'll give new life to stuff you might have forgotten was even in your closet.

14

Carrying a bag. Because you're going somewhere, and you need the stuff—from your laptop to your hand sanitizer—inside of it. (Doesn't hurt if the bag itself looks pretty great, too.)

BRIEFCASE ($3,850) BY **VALEXTRA.**

15

Just-right, high-end workwear from the eponymous label of Toledo-born Darryl Brown, who logged time as a steelworker and a railroad engineer before launching his own brand.

16

The jersey suit, a transition item that bridges the gap from summer to fall and the move from indoor comfort to outdoor style.

Rule No. *387*
NO ONE IS MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN THE MAN WHO RUNS A MARATHON AND NEVER MENTIONS IT.

17

Wearing an automatic watch regularly enough that it tells the correct time *and* date again.

PROSPEX AUTOMATIC DIVER WATCH ($595) BY **SEIKO.**

18

London-based designer Nicholas Daley's ability to take elements of the abstract and the familiar—like a hand-drawn, nigh-psychedelic riff on classic camo—and make them feel right at home together.

Got a *Decision* *You've* to Make

Men's hair is moving in TWO DISTINCT DIRECTIONS. Which way are you going?

by GARRETT MUNCE

TWO CAMPS, BOTH ALIKE IN DIGNITY: THE GUYS WHO GRABBED the clippers and chopped off their hair in quarantine, and the dudes who let it grow. The follicular foundations have been laid, and now the question is: Where do we go from here? Hair trends, even for men, are born from culture—like the clean-cut 1920s and the wild 1970s. So which will the 2020s more closely resemble? The answer may just be "Pick your poison."

TIGHTEN UP

There are always men who feel more comfortable with crisp, traditional looks, particularly a certain sort of men. "Businessmen are going to be the first ones back at the barbershop," says celebrity groomer Melissa DeZarate. But even before his shop closed due to the pandemic, barber Doug Paster advised some clients to go shorter. "Every millimeter of hair counts; knocking it down gives the haircut another few weeks [between cuts]," he says.

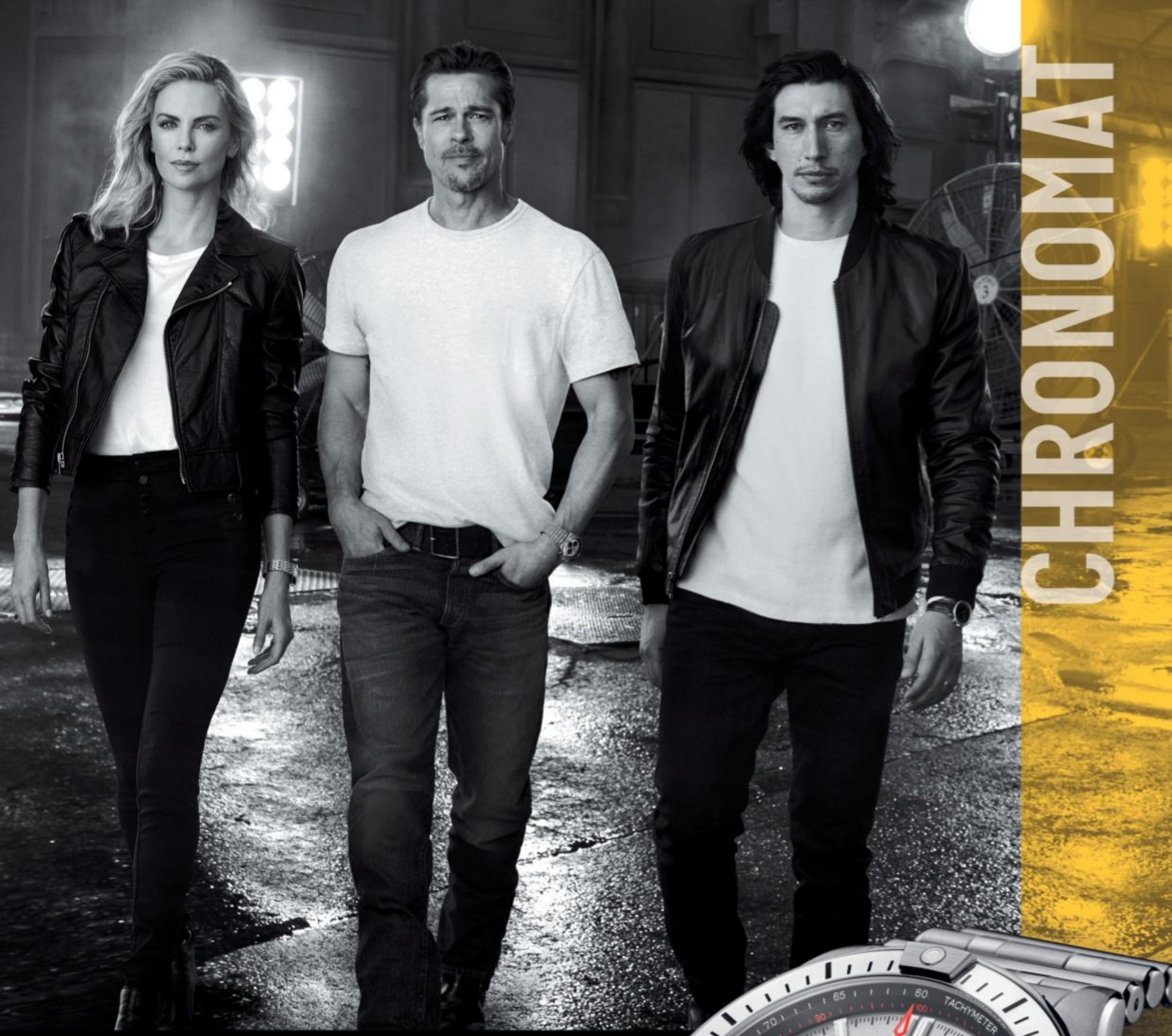
The cut itself is symbolic—it represents a return to normalcy. "It's like coming home from summer camp. You go back to school, hair above the neck, clean shave; it's back to reality," says celebrity groomer Kristan Serafino. Going back to a cleaner, classic look has to do with how it feels, after all. "It's freeing to not worry about what's going on with my hair," says business-development manager Alistair Connal, who cropped his while in isolation. "I'll keep it short and just slick it down."

LET IT FLOW

The biggest hurdle to growing out your hair is getting past that awkward middle phase. But if quarantine gave us anything, it's time. "I figured it was now or never," says Stan Parish, author of *Love and Theft,* who avoided clippers. "This may be the best moment in the 21st century to grow out your hair." Both Serafino's and DeZarate's famous clients did the same, and we'll be seeing the fruits of their (non)labor in free-flowing styles.

Longer hair could also come down to money. "It's going to be: 'I don't really want to spend $50 on a haircut every four weeks, especially if I'm living on unemployment or I don't know when I'm getting my next job,' " DeZarate says about a choice many of us may face. And those quarantine beards? They may stick around, too. According to Serafino, once you nail beard maintenance and get used to the feeling after a few months, it's easier to go about your day bearded. Long live the flow.

ALAMY (MORRIS). GETTY IMAGES (REMAINING).



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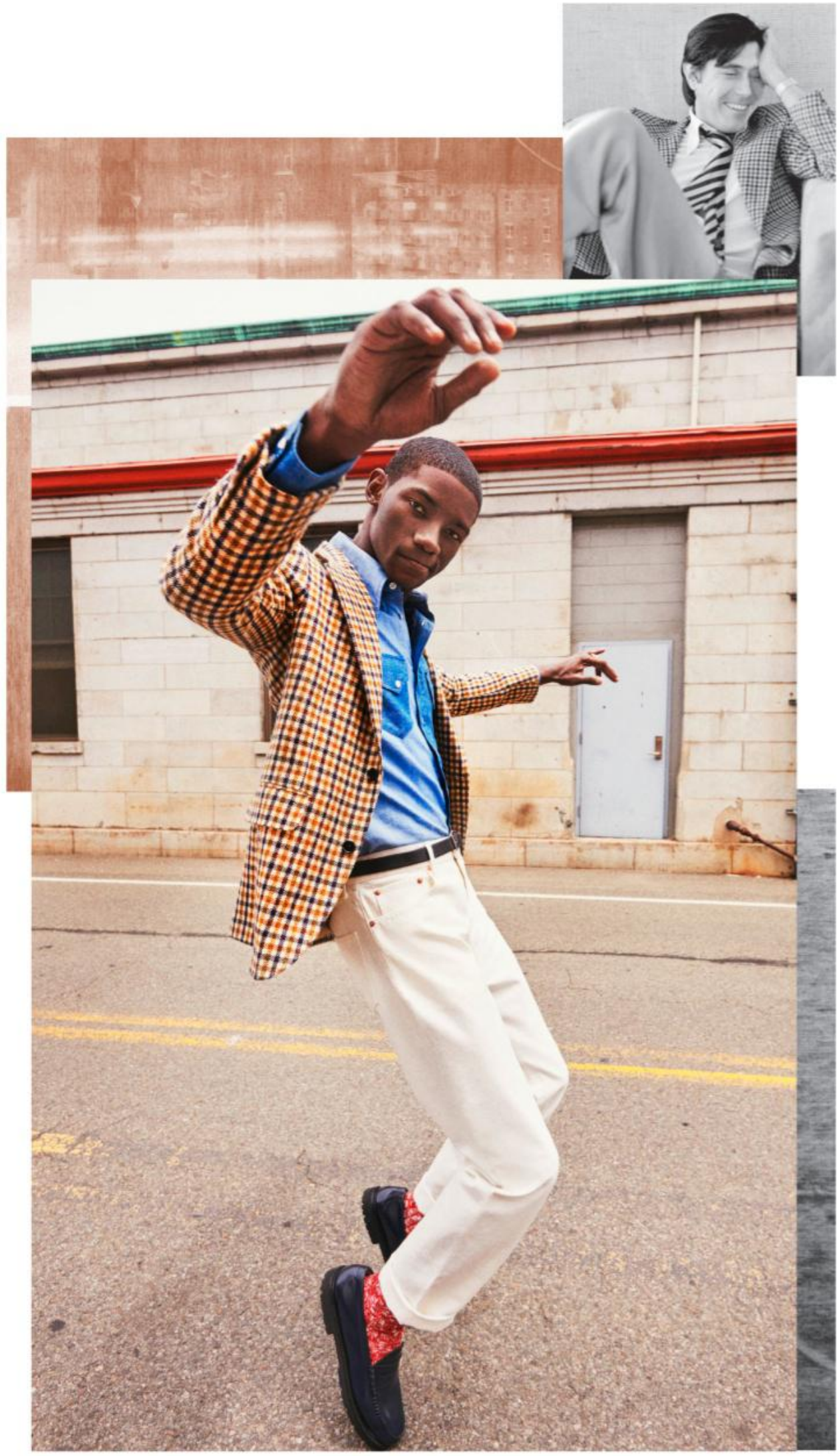

VINTAGE PATTERN, *whole* NEW VIBE

The GUN-CLUB CHECK started as a way to blend in on British estates. Now it's the perfect way to stand out.

by NICK SULLIVAN

***SEXY* IS A WORD NOT COM-**monly used in the same sentence as *tweed*. *Posh,* yup. *Scratchy,* possibly. But the fact is the fabric—even with its upper-crusty, country origins—*can* be sexy. And as finding your own personal style becomes more and more important, reevaluating classic elements piecemeal is a handy way to elevate your look. Take the gun-club-check jacket, a pillar of the Anglo nob wardrobe whose story is way cooler than you might imagine.

Estate-tweed patterns like gun-club checks were the Victorian period's proto camouflage. In a mid-19th-century mania for shooting estates in Scotland, newly minted Sassenachs from England (without the right to wear a tartan) needed something to wear. And they learned that the game found it harder to see you if you looked like a native shrub. Tweed mills like the 220-something-year-old Johnstons of Elgin would create a bespoke tweed by making an artist's impression—in wool—of the local grounds. Greens and browns were a given, but there would also be tiny flecks of purple and yellow for the heather; gray, white, and blue for the granite. These became known as gun-club checks (according to legend) after an American gun club, in a rush of Anglophilia, adopted it as its very own pattern around 1870.

These days, gun checks have new appeal. We're seeing them in a raft of young-minded, vaguely sartorial brands from Drake's to Massimo Alba to the Armoury, plus fashion-leaning labels like Martine Rose. At Husbands Paris, the look is British with a twist. Think Bryan Ferry (top) popping out for coffee. You can do the same, making it yours with a denim shirt and white jeans. Or you can throw it over exuberantly striped trousers, like Rose did in her latest collection. The trick is finding what works for you. And then not thinking about it too much. Which, as it happens, is the whole point of personal style.

JACKET ($1,085) BY **HUSBANDS;** SHIRT AND TROUSERS BY **HOLIDAY BOILEAU;** LOAFERS ($220) BY **G.H. BASS & CO. WEEJUNS;** SOCKS ($29) BY **ANONYMOUS ISM.**

SUZAN CARSON/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (FERRY).

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN HOGSTEDT

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MEN'S JEWELRY

EXCLUSIVELY AT

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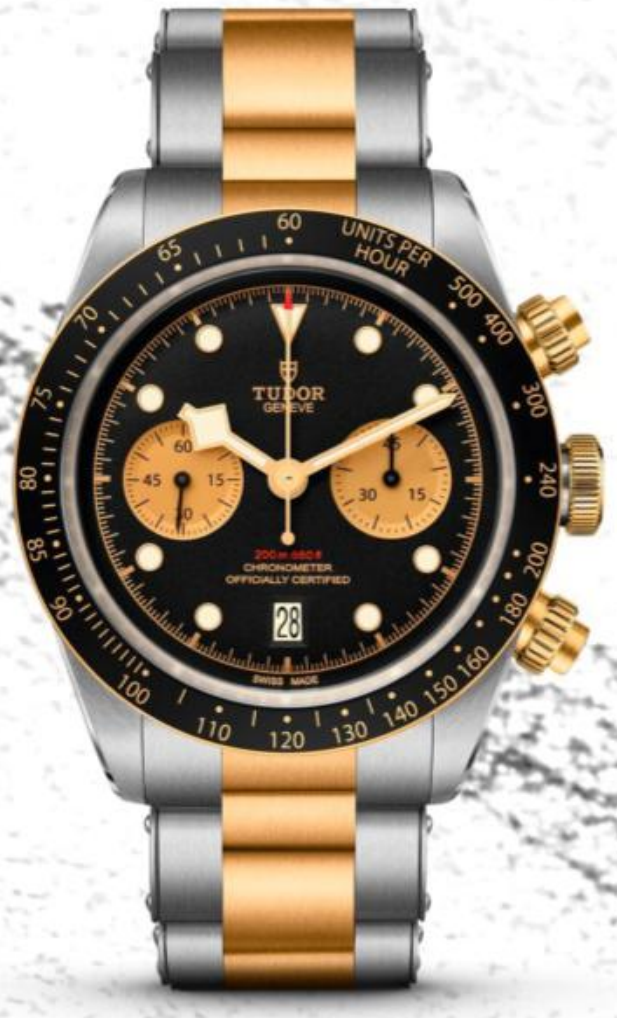
THE SHORT STORIES



BLACK BAY CHRONO S&G WATCH ($7,000) BY **TUDOR.**

A Fast Watch with a Long History

THERE'S NEVER BEEN A SHORTAGE OF ICONIC CHRONO-graphs out there for lovers of the ultimate sport watch. But if you wanted to nail the golden age of the chronograph, for my money it would be the ten years from 1963 to 1973, when it first crossed from the pro racetrack into the public imagination.

Once the era kicked off with the Rolex Cosmograph Daytona in '63, a beefy chronograph said you lived fast and probably drove too fast. Even if you didn't, your watch implied it—which was the point. (As it happens, the dive watch, with its aquatic-adventurer implications, also boomed in popularity during this time frame.) Playing with the extra knobs and buttons constituted a new level of interaction. But while the functionality was, of course, key, the period also saw watch designers give free rein to their creativity, bringing surprising and chunky new case shapes and often a funky rainbow of bright accent colors into play for the first time. Suddenly chronos were not only cool; they were chic, too. The most valuable vintage watches now mostly stem from this heady decade and represent arguably the most robust part of the vintage-watch market.

This year, Rolex's sister brand, Tudor, celebrates 50 years of the Tudor Oysterdate, a watch that confirmed when it debuted in 1970 the bold, angular, and colorful nature of the chronographs of the time. Later editions evolved the look, upgraded the movements, and softened the angles a touch, all without losing the essential feel of the original. The most recent version in this remarkably consistent lineage is the Tudor Black Bay Chrono (released in 2019), which features a bimetal case and strap in steel and gold. Or you could save up for an original "Home Plate" from 1970, so named by fans for the shape of its hour markers. But you might be saving for a while. In 2018, a black-dialed version sold for $92,500.

Tudor's Black Bay Chrono is inspired by the golden age of chronographs

by NICK SULLIVAN

COURTESY TUDOR. MILLENNIUM IMAGES/GALLERY STOCK (BACKGROUND).

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As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on—shuttering movie theaters and forcing films to delay their release dates and TV productions to go on extended hiatus—one medium remains vital: music. With protest anthems, creative reawakenings, and revitalized masterpieces (new Prince! new Tom Petty!), the fall is stacked with remarkable tunes. Here's what to look out for. by MADISON VAIN

MIND MELD WITH FANTASTIC NEGRITO

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE a more fitting title in 2020 than *Have You Lost Your Mind Yet?* (out now), which graces the cover of the third LP from Xavier Dphrepaulezz, aka Fantastic Negrito. "I was dealing with, okay, a kid who's been reading all this white-supremacist ideology and identifying with the Confederate flag goes into a church and shoots nine people," the Oakland rocker says of what was weighing on him. "A guy in Las Vegas decides to start arbitrarily murdering people. And what really inspired me was Sandy Hook. We forgot about these little babies. The gun violence—it seemed like it was nothing to us as Americans. We just accepted it." But *Mind* is more than just a timely release. It's also the most thrilling set of music yet in the two-time Grammy winner's career. A mosh pit of sticky R&B, blistering soul, and the *boom-thwack* of hip-hop (aided by guest spots from rapper E-40 and Tank, of Tank and the Bangas), the 11-song collection flat out cooks. "I was all over the place in these sessions. I just love music. I love the vibrations." And at 52 years old, he is self-assured enough to do as he damn well pleases. "The beautiful thing," he teases, "is that I don't really give a fuck."

SKLYAREEK/SHUTTERSTOCK (HEADPHONES). JAMES PATERSON/GETTY IMAGES (SMOKE). WILLEM WOUTERSE (NEGRITO).

Shamir Bailey Pops

"WHAT DO I HAVE TO MODEL MYSELF AFTER?" ASKS 25-year-old Shamir Bailey. "Someone like me has never seen themselves in pop music." Black, queer, and gender nonbinary, the Las Vegas native might be right. It's a fraught thing to be the first, but Bailey is finally ready. This October will see the release of *Shamir,* an outsize collection of Technicolor pop testimonies and the most visceral—not to mention danceable—musical account of isolation that 2020 will hear. "I feel more confident, not only in my sound but in myself and my health."

That perspective was hard-won. In 2015, the pressures of trailblazing nearly forced the singer out of music. With a viral debut single ("On the Regular") and a buzzy album (*Ratchet*), Bailey felt trapped. "It was like, I'm creating this path for me," explains the singer, who uses different pronouns at different times (he/him, she/her, they/them). "I can't fuck it up, because then there's going to be people after me, who look like me, who look at me [as a guide]."

Bailey's creativity was also stifled. The singer claims a wide swath of influences but felt compelled to stay in the electro-pop box. As the differences in vision became more obvious, the label, XL Recordings, cut ties. "After that, the idea of pop music was so triggering," says Bailey. In 2017, Bailey was hospitalized; a bipolar-disorder diagnosis followed.

It was a "godsend," Bailey says now. It gave the artist the tools to get healthy—and a chance to rewrite the story. Bailey calls icons Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Nina Simone personal saviors and says that a return to pop meant a victory over a similarly tragic end. "I did not want that for me," Bailey says. "What does that say to other people that look like me? This is bigger than me. I do this for my ancestors."

A BRIEF CONVERSATION WITH DISCLOSURE

Brothers Guy and Howard Lawrence broke big in 2014 with the earworm "Latch," featuring Sam Smith. On August 28, the electronic duo return with their first full-length in half a decade, *Energy*.

It's been five years since your last LP. And there's been no touring in 2020. This has become your longest break.
Guy: It was nice to have the luxury of time. It's always been "write as much as you can" until we feel like we need to get back on the road. We got to the third album and thought, *[Our fans] will give us some time.* Now they've probably waited longer than we planned.
Howard: We knew we wanted to write like 200 songs and pick the ten best. We got the idea from Sam Smith, who did it for his last album. Halfway through, we were like, This was a terrible idea! This is horrible. [*Laughs*]

The features roster here is steep. Along with U.S. and UK rappers and R&B stars like Kelis, Common, Syd, Kehlani, and Slowthai, you really embraced African pop with Blick Bassy and Fatoumata Diawara.
Guy: We definitely had in our minds that we needed to branch out for this record. And Africa, with all of its incredibly diverse genres of music, was something we hadn't explored much. It felt natural to go more percussive. I didn't know [Bassy] before a year ago. Now I listen to him nonstop.
Howard: [With Bassy] we literally just jammed for about eight minutes and then that was the song—we were done. He's able to use his voice in a very improvised way. It's like lyrically informed scat.

As dance music has bled into the mainstream sound, how do you find new territory to stay weird?
Howard: We've never been able to set our minds to making something and then it comes out exactly as we intended. When we first started making music, we were trying to imitate people like James Blake. It came out sounding nothing like them. We accidentally made pop music. Our favorite way of working is we turn up with nothing and [our collaborators] turn up with nothing, and we all make something from scratch.

TOM PETTY IN THE WILD, AGAIN

WILDFLOWERS & ALL THE REST
October 16

In 1994, at the age of 44, Tom Petty debuted his finest collection. *Wildflowers* is the diary of a man who, as he sings on "To Find a Friend," "in the middle of his life/He left his wife/And ran off to be bad"—but it's not what he intended to release. In the early stages of a divorce and a heroin addiction, Petty spent two years with producer Rick Rubin. The songs, which feel like unhurried batches of self-dialogue, just kept coming. Yet Warner Bros. Records deemed it criminally long. Forced to trim, Petty passed off outtakes to director Ed Burns for the soundtrack to *She's the One,* but much to his chagrin, when the movie was delayed, the record was marketed as new Tom Petty. "I was so depressed," he told his biographer, Warren Zanes. In 2017, he spoke about releasing his initial vision; unfortunately, as we know now, he would run out of time. In October, three years after his death, it finally arrives. The sprawling deluxe sets include the ten tracks left off the original LP, plus never-released home demos and recordings from Heartbreakers shows. It's a triumph we can only hope Petty enjoys from behind the shimmery screen.

5 CAN'T-MISS FALL ALBUMS

TIM McGRAW
HERE ON EARTH
Out now
Although it's been five years since the country megastar released a solo LP, Tim McGraw isn't feeling rushed. "We really took our time to dig in and create a record that sounds fresh," he says via email. "As the world changed around us, I found the lyrical messages started to take on additional meaning."

PRINCE BOX SET
September 25
An expanded reissue of the Purple One's 1987 album, *Sign O' the Times,* arrives this year with 45(!) previously unreleased studio tracks, plus two concert recordings—including his New Year's Eve set at Paisley Park, when jazz great Miles Davis joined the legend onstage.

SUFJAN STEVENS
THE ASCENSION
September 25
Say goodbye to the folk god of albums like *Carrie & Lowell.* Instead, on his eighth solo effort, the musical shape-shifter creates an unmissable sound bath of warm synths and skittering beats.

SIA
TITLE TBD
September
The pop juggernaut rounded up an all-star cast of hitmakers—Jack Antonoff, Labrinth, Matt Corby, and more—for a collection of stadium-sized bangers and ballads. The cinematic sweep comes naturally: Some, like "Together" and "Music," are featured in the artist's directorial debut, *Music.*

MATT BERNINGER
SERPENTINE PRISON
October 2
The National frontman sidesteps into a gravelly solo debut this fall. Laced with horns and produced by Memphis-bred master Booker T. Jones (Bill Withers, Otis Redding), the ten originals are downright soulful.

AMY HARRIS/INVISION/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK (BAILEY). HOLLIE FERNANDO (DISCLOSURE). MARK SELIGER (PETTY).

THEN. NOW. ALWAYS.

It's hard to surpass Clarks Desert Boots as a staple of coolness—their elegant, simple, utilitarian design never goes out of fashion. Cherished by beat poets, mod rockers, Jamaican rude boys, Hollywood icons, as well as you and me—less famous but just as important people everywhere—they are the hallmark of personal style. Defined but never bound by tradition and craftsmanship, Clarks makes sure the Desert Boot stays modern—the new 2s and 221s are gorgeous, with an emphasis on greater comfort, but still in harmony with the rest of the desert boot family, including the original. The balance between innovation and heritage is always a chief concern for the brand, says Giorgio Presca, CEO of C&J Clark International.

DESERT BOOT 221 IN WHITE SUEDE

DESERT BOOT 2 IN SAND SUEDE

SHOP CLARKS AT CLARKSUSA.COM.

"This year, we have embraced a simpler, more thoughtful way of life, with a focus on long-lasting and timeless products. The Desert Boot embodies these qualities. It's a staple—eternally cool and effortless. For everybody."

- Giorgio Presca

ESQ: How do you strike a balance between tradition and innovation?

GP: The new Desert Boot 2 and 221 are designed with our original intentions of function and utility but enhanced to create an entirely new statement with an adjusted shape, volume, and added level of instant comfort. Sustainability is important—an individual pair can itself last decades, as it's a style that only improves with time and becomes unique to the wearer.

ESQ: What gives your boots their international appeal?

GP: We view the Clarks Desert Boot as the most democratic shoe of all time. It's a shoe everyone can, and does, wear. In a sea of choice, people tend to gravitate to authenticity, and this is something that is recognized worldwide, in different cultures, spanning generations. Our desert boots are at once simple and highly sophisticated—making them endlessly versatile.

ESQ: How do you envision Desert Boots for 2020 and beyond?

GP: We continue to draw on the historic attributes and core design, while evolving for today with improved comfort technologies and materials. We also seek out opportunities to collaborate with groundbreaking designers, artists, and brands—from Bergdorf Goodman to BAPE.

ESQ: What's the most important part of the Desert Boot's legacy?

GP: The people who wore them and continue to wear them—who make them fashionable, relevant for their everyday lives, and carry the legacy forward. With his creation, Nathan Clark introduced the iconic silhouette not only to Clarks, but to the broader fashion world. Today, you can find a number of imitators, but Clarks is the true original. And the boots are the clearest articulation of our current campaign: embraced then, relevant today, and set to remain so for decades to come.

THEN.
NOW.
ALWAYS.

ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD
LONDON, ENGLAND

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Clarks

Your Next *getaway* Is a Screen Door Away

As the heat of summer gives way to the cool of fall, the best escape might be your own backyard. By adding this gear to your outdoor area, you can take it from sad to sanctuary, no matter your acreage. by DANIEL DUMAS

– 1
HESTAN OUTDOOR GRILL
The Bugatti of grills comes loaded with features like ceramic infrared top burners and diamond-cut grates. And with a dozen color options available, it can be customized faster than a pair of NikeIDs.
$11,299; HESTAN.COM

– 2
CLASSIC LAWN CHAIR
When it comes to a comfortable outdoor folding chair, it's hard to beat this mid-century webbed version. Avoid reproductions–they tend to fall apart. This one is built using the original methods.
$70; STORE.MOMA.ORG

– 3
NANIMARQUINA SILHOUETTE OUTDOOR RUG BY JAIME HAYON
If you want to, like, really tie the deck together, man, try an outdoor rug that makes a serious statement, like this one from acclaimed designer Jaime Hayon. $3,345; HIVEMODERN.COM

– 4
TERRA TRAY & SET OF THREE POTS
Stunning terra-cotta and stainless-steel construction from Norwegian-based design studio Snøhetta will no doubt have you showing everyone what you've been growing.
$139; GEORGJENSEN.COM

SATORU KOBAYASHI/GETTY IMAGES (CLOUDS)

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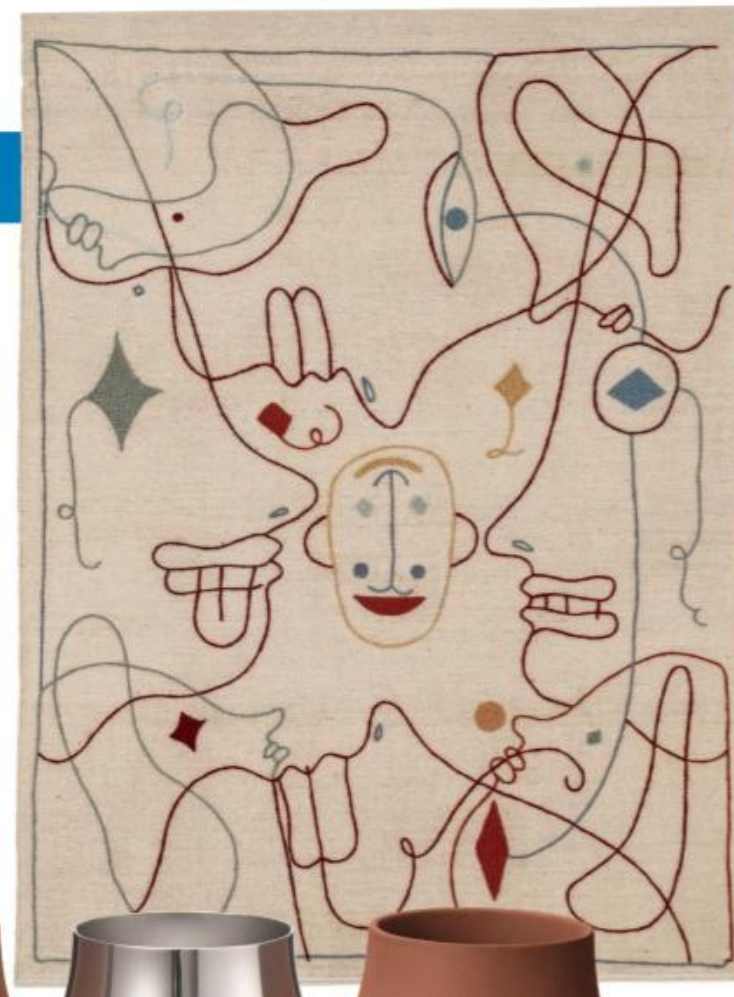

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URI PORTABLE TABLE LAMP
This lamp is:
A) Unquestionably beautiful?
B) Exclusive to the MoMA Design Store?
C) Able to shine for seven hours at full power?
D) All of the above!
$50; STORE.MOMA.ORG

_ 6
OONI KODA 16 GAS-POWERED OUTDOOR PIZZA OVEN
The average time it takes for pizza delivery? Thirty to 45 minutes. The average time it takes for the Ooni Koda to bake a pie? Sixty seconds flat, thanks to heat that can hit 932°F.
$499; OONI.COM

_ 7
SNOW PEAK TAKIBI APRON
The Takibi apron offers up legit protection from fire. Bonus: Split-leg hems won't limit your mobility, while external and internal pockets can stow everything from grilling gear to a hip flask.
$225; SNOWPEAK.COM

_ 8
PLODES GEOMETRIC FIRE PIT
Does your current fire pit consist of a shallow hole filled with shredded newspapers? Consider upgrading to this model from Plodes, which resembles a piece of origami.
$2,145; DWR.COM

_ 9
EPSON EF-100 MINI-LASER STREAMING PROJECTOR
Outdoor movie night = safer than theaters. Epson's coffee-table-book-sized mini projector is packed with streaming services and can project images up to a whopping 150 inches.
$1,000; EPSON.COM

_ 10
SOURGRASSBUILT BIRDHOUSE
With its decidedly mid-century vibe, this avian abode–called the Sunset Modern–is styled after the renowned Eichler houses that dot northern California.
$350; SOURGRASSBUILT.COM

more than a place to eat

With Virtue, chef ERICK WILLIAMS has created a sanctuary. And now more chefs are following his lead. by JEFF GORDINIER

WAY BACK IN 2018, WHEN ERICK WILLIAMS, A CHEF IN CHICAGO, WAS DREAMING OF opening a restaurant called Virtue, he had something of a spiritual prototype in mind: "What inspired me the most was the idea of Dooky Chase's." ¶ Williams could tell you that Dooky Chase's is a restaurant in New Orleans that opened in 1941, but that would be like describing Prince as a musician from Minneapolis. Dooky Chase's remains iconic as a strategic hub of the civil-rights movement, a haven for Black diners who had no other elegant options in the era of segregation, a showcase for Creole cooking and Black art, all of it presided over by chef and matriarch Leah Chase, who died last year at the age of 96. ¶ Virtue and Dooky Chase's don't have that much in common from the perspective of cuisine, but Williams always wanted Virtue, located in Barack Obama's neighborhood of Hyde Park, to stand tall as a similar celebration of Blackness. "Everybody is invited to come eat at Dooky Chase's," Williams said when he and I talked via Zoom in June. "What is the historical context of that place? Segregation was in full effect. So you went there for more than nourishment. You went there for a reset. You went there because you belonged. You went there because the space was inviting to you. You went there because you'd had the worst day of your life, but if you could just get in those doors, someone would understand. You could be heard. You could be recognized. You could be valued. I'm not old enough to know fully what the experience was like to have to live through segregation or Jim Crow laws. But I can hear the pain in my parents' voices when they talk about it. And in some ways, we're fighting to protect and preserve what we have now." ¶ "Support Black-owned businesses" became a rallying cry in June, yes, but throughout the United States we still have far too few examples of Black-owned restaurants that, like Dooky Chase's, stand a chance of staying open and family-run for close to 80 years. Ownership continues to elude even many of the most celebrated Black chefs in America. Representation in cookbooks and panel discussions may be nice, but it doesn't go far enough. ¶ In this respect, Williams and Virtue suggest a fundamental model for progress—the same model of self-reliance proposed over the years by leaders from Booker T. Washington to Malcolm X to Killer Mike, who devoted an episode of his Netflix show, *Trigger Warning,* to the challenges of trying to get through three days patronizing exclusively Black-owned businesses. From the very start, Williams conceived of Virtue as a restaurant that would be owned by people who understood what it meant to Chicago's South Side. The majority of his investors—about 80 percent—are Black. ¶ Virtue, like Dooky Chase's, is a restaurant that America can't afford to lose, and it's more likely to survive the pandemic—and the decades to follow—with investors who know that in their bones. "African-Americans need to own their space, whether it's their homes or their restaurants," Williams told me. "Everybody keeps talking about a seat at the table. Someone said to me one time, they said, 'Oh, this is great, you own your space, so you're finally going to have a seat at the table.' I said, 'I don't even like the idea of having a seat at the table. I just bought the fucking table.'" ¶ And owning the table allows him to create a sanctuary like the one in New Orleans that first inspired him. For Black customers, Virtue offers a refuge from the oppressive whiteness of eating in spaces where they don't always feel welcome. "They want their kids to witness their dining in a Black chef's restaurant—and understand that their family has invested in that space," Williams said. ¶ You can never underestimate the virtue in that.

SERGEY SKLEZNEV/GETTY IMAGES (1). COURTESY OF VIRTUE (ALL OTHERS).

ADVERTISEMENT

GET BACK IN SHAPE

YOUR GUIDE TO LOSING WEIGHT

BY CHRIS HANSEN

Being a trainer, bodybuilder, and nutrition expert means that companies frequently send me their products and ask for my stamp of approval. Most of the time I dive into research, test the product out, and send the company honest feedback. Sometimes, however, I refuse to give the product a try, because frankly, the ingredients inside aren't real food. And I'd rather drink diesel fuel than torture my body with a chemical concoction.

Like my father always said, "What you put inside your body always shows up on the outside."

One protein shake that I received, that will remain nameless, was touted as 'the next big shake' but really had a list of gut destroying ingredients. Everywhere I read I saw harmful artificial ingredients, added sugars, synthetic dyes, preservatives and cheap proteins; the kind of proteins that keep you fat no matter how hard you hit the gym, sap your energy and do nothing for your muscles.

Disappointed after reviewing this "new" shake, I hit the gym and bumped into my favorite bodybuilding coach. This guy is pushing 50, has the energy of a college kid, and is ripped. So are his clients.

While I firmly believe that the gym is a no-talk focus zone, I had to ask, "Hey Zee, what protein shake are you recommending to your clients these days?"

Zee looked at me, and shook his head. "Protein shakes are old news and loaded with junk. I don't recommend protein shakes, I tell my clients to drink INVIGOR8 Superfood Shake because it's the only all natural meal replacement that works and has a taste so good that it's addicting."

Being skeptical of what Zee told me, I decided to investigate this superfood shake called INVIGOR8.

Turns out INVIGOR8 Superfood Shake has a near 5-star rating on Amazon. The creators are actual scientists and personal trainers who set out to create a complete meal replacement shake chocked full of superfoods that—get this—actually accelerate how quickly and easily you lose belly fat and builds even more lean, calorie burning muscle.

We all know that the more muscle you build, the more calories you burn. The more fat you melt away the more definition you get in your arms, pecs and abs.

The makers of INVIGOR8 were determined to make the first complete, natural, non-GMO superfood shake that helps you lose fat and build lean muscle. The result is a shake that contains 100% grass-fed whey that has a superior nutrient profile to the grain-fed whey found in most shakes, metabolism boosting raw coconut oil, hormone free colostrum to promote a healthy immune system, Omega 3, 6, 9-rich chia and flaxseeds, superfood greens like kale, spinach, broccoli, alfalfa, and chlorella, and clinically tested cognitive enhancers for improved mood and brain function. The company even went a step further by including a balance of pre and probiotics for regularity in optimal digestive health, and digestive enzymes so your body absorbs the high-caliber nutrition you get from INVIGOR8.

While there are over 1000 testimonials on Amazon about how INVIGOR8 "gave me more energy and stamina" and "melts away abdominal fat like butter on a hot sidewalk", what really impressed me was how many customers raved about the taste. So I had to give it a try.

When it arrived I gave it the sniff test. Unlike most meal replacement shakes it smelled like whole food, not a chemical factory. So far so good. Still INVIGOR8 had to pass the most important test, the taste test.

And INVIGOR8 was good. Better than good. I could see what Zee meant when he said his clients found the taste addicting.

I also wanted to see if Invigor8 would help me burn that body fat I'd tried to shave off for years to achieve total definition.

Just a few weeks later I'm pleased to say, shaving that last abdominal fat from my midsection wasn't just easy. It was delicious.

Considering all the shakes I've tried I can honestly say that the results I've experienced from INVIGOR8 are nothing short of astonishing.

A company spokesperson confirmed an exclusive offer for Esquire's readers: if you order INVIGOR8 this month, you'll receive $10 off your first order by using promo code "ESQ10" at checkout. If you're in a rush to burn fat, restore lean muscle and boost your stamina and energy you can order INVIGOR8 today at www.drinkInvigor8.com or by calling 1-800-958-3392.

A Black Lives Matter protest on the steps of Borough Hall, Brooklyn, June 7, 2020.

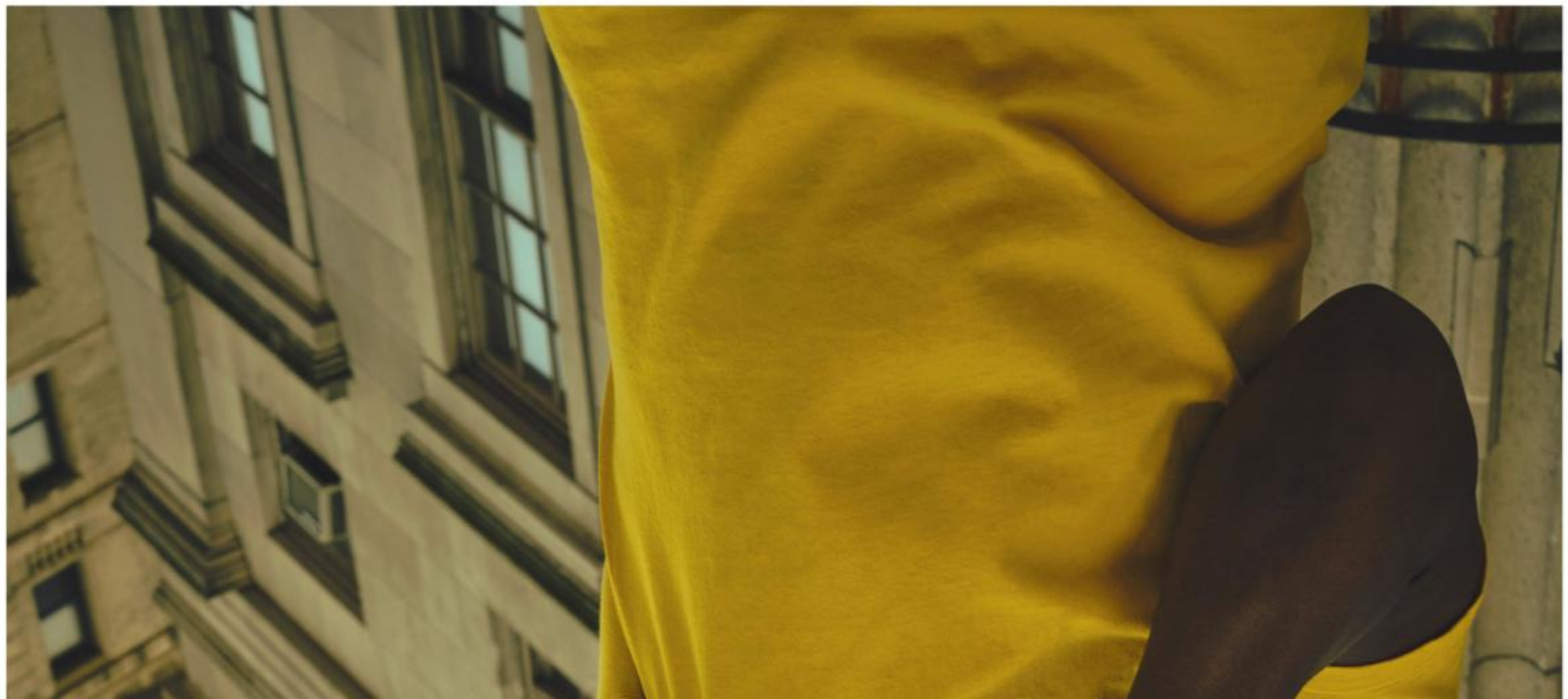
W

I dread a future for my older son in which people fail him, and a future for my younger son in which systems fail him.

BY IJEOMA OLUO

ONE DAY HE'LL UNDERSTAND

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES MOONEY



"MOM,

I UNDERSTAND THE PROTESTS," MARCUS SAID ONE MORNING over breakfast at the kitchen table of our home, in the suburbs of Seattle. A little more than two weeks had passed since George Floyd's murder and the start of the nationwide uprising it inspired. "But I don't understand the broken windows or the buildings set on fire. It's not right to burn down a building you don't own."

Over the years, I've fielded countless questions about systemic racism from Marcus and his older brother, Malcolm. As they've grown, my answers have evolved. How I explained everything when they were ten was different from how I explained it when they were six. Still, I've struggled with how to prepare my sons for the racist world into which they were born while also making room for their dreams. There's no easy way to sugarcoat the explanation to a child of why they cannot play with toy guns outside, a required conversation in our home after Tamir Rice was killed by a white police officer in Cleveland—that a Black boy is at risk by holding anything that an officer could perceive as a weapon.

Malcolm is eighteen and entering college in the fall, and he—like every other teenager—prefers to discuss social issues with people far cooler than his mother. As Marcus, who's twelve, approaches those hellish, hormonal years we know as junior high, he still turns to me to help him make sense of the world. I've raised him and his brother to know that standing for Black liberation and against white supremacy is good. Breaking things—especially other people's things—is bad. When you're young, moral rules seem settled matters.

Now, at the kitchen table, Marcus wanted me to help reconcile the movement for Black lives with the destruction in the immediate aftermath of Floyd's murder that people carried out in the name of this cause.

Marcus looked at me expectantly. He wanted me to agree with him. Ever since he could talk, he's sought to understand how the world works, and why, and what the rules are, and who's responsible for making them. He's what you might call a systems thinker.

"I just think it's wrong," he said, hoping to prompt a response. He wanted me to cast the situation in terms of right (peaceful protest) and wrong (rioting and looting), to reinforce the moral guidelines I had raised him to follow. He wanted me to comfort him. Make him feel safe.

And I couldn't do it. I couldn't tell him that the rioting was wrong. I searched my soul for a way to explain a lifetime of experience that left me unable to condemn the fires and the broken windows. It felt too raw, too deep, too vast. All I could say was: "One day you'll understand." Which is the king of crappy parental answers.

"Ugh, Mom, I'm not dumb," he snapped.

"I don't mean it like that," I tried to explain. "I don't mean that you aren't smart enough or mature enough." But he wasn't listening. He walked away, frustrated and insulted.

But really, I didn't mean it like that at all.

I WAS A YEAR YOUNGER THAN MARCUS WHEN, IN 1991, RODNEY KING was brutally beaten by police. I remember my fear as I watched the footage of batons crashing down on King. I was Marcus's age when the officers involved were acquitted. I remember the riots that erupted in the streets of Los Angeles. Like Marcus many years later, I didn't fully understand the fires and looting, but I was starting to understand that what had inspired them was bigger than a few bad officers or one instance of brutality.

Growing up, my brother and I didn't talk much about King's beating or the riots with our mother, who's white. She condemned the officers' actions, and she understood that racism was at the root of what they did and why they were set free. She loved her children's Blackness. But she did not have the lived experience of being Black in America, nor the sense of rage born of living in a system designed to oppress her. Whatever questions I had about the riots, it did not occur to me to ask my mother.

I was Malcolm's age when I attended my first protest, in 1999. I started out big: the biennial gathering of the WTO, held that year in Seattle. We—more than forty thousand protesters from all different walks of life—were standing against the globalized exploitation of labor. I wore shoes that weren't nearly comfortable enough. I chanted and sang. I stood between white, male union members in their fifties and sixties and a group of young, female climate activists. I felt immense love emanating from those around me. Then came the tear gas and the screaming. The Seattle Police Department responded to the mostly peaceful crowds with crushing force. Later, their brutality would be recognized as marking a new standard for the militarization of police in quashing dissent—which, in the coming years, would be perfected on Black bodies.

After 9/11, I campaigned to raise awareness about the government's unjust detention and deportation of people of color who lacked citizenship. I protested the invasion of Iraq. I wondered how those in power so easily ignored the voices of hundreds of thousands joining together in dissent, but I kept marching. I marched for Trayvon Martin. With each action—each protest, each meeting, each rally—I felt that I was part of something much bigger and more powerful than myself, and that we were changing the course of history. Each time, I believed that we were on the verge of great change. Until I didn't.

I don't know when exactly this change occurred. But I do know that I was no longer the same optimistic activist by the time Mike Brown—eighteen, Malcolm's age—was killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. I remember sitting at my desk at the office where I worked at the time,

Leimert Park, Los Angeles, June 6, 2020.

trying not to cry as I read that this young man's body was left in the street for hours like a bag of trash. When the St. Louis County prosecutor announced that no charges would be filed against the officer who'd shot Brown, I felt a distinct hopelessness. One of my bosses, who was white, said that while he didn't think Trayvon Martin deserved to be killed, Mike Brown was probably a bad guy and the world was better off without him.

Desperation sank in. There was nothing I could do to ensure that I, my family, or my community would be safe from violent white supremacy. The world would never see our marches and enact change. Our demands for freedom would be met only with force. Our society prized the comfort of the privileged, white few over the basic humanity of the disenfranchised many. I still faced racism every day—the microaggressions, the macroaggressions. I still received a lower standard of health care. I was still underrepresented and undervalued. I would still fear for my life at every traffic stop. I would never receive support from those in power, or from those who at one time were on the right side of justice but who'd long ago resigned themselves to the status quo. For all those years of protest and action, I'd been shouting my pain into a void. I felt tired, hurt, desolate, and enraged.

Still, I marched: for Charleena Lyles, for Philando Castile, for Sandra Bland, for so, so many Black lives lost. And sometimes at those protests, a fellow

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXIS HUNLEY

protester who also felt tired, hurt, desolate, and enraged would break a window or set a fire. When that happened, those in power felt that the things they held dear were under threat, and only then would they pay attention. Time and again we've witnessed that in this country, Black humanity has a dollar value, and a low one at that. Our pain has mattered less than cotton, corporations, or the national anthem at a football game. Your storefronts are made unsafe not by the violent nature of Black protesters but by society's refusal to listen to any peaceful form of protest. Black people have tried. Disruption works. Rioting works.

And that is what we witnessed in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Buildings burned, and cop cars were incinerated and left in the street, and then Black people's calls for change started being heard. We've made more progress toward demilitarizing the police in the past few months than we have in years of protest. Anything to stop the destruction of property.

That is infuriating—our words ought to be enough. Our humanity ought to be enough. But they aren't. So all I could say in response to my younger son on that morning in June was: "One day you'll understand."

But then, not long after Marcus walked away in frustration, I realized what I'd really said to him: One day the fire in his eyes would burn out. No matter what I did to protect him, he would be hurt so very much by our racist systems. He would see, as I have seen, that we could not appeal to the humanity of a country that did not see us as human beings. I'd told my son that one day he would give up the hope that his words, his ideas, his actions would be enough to change the world.

I'd written his future in the mold of my past. And I was devastated.

MY CHILDREN ARE NOT NEW TO ACTIVISM. WHEN MALCOLM was little and I was a single mother, young and still motivated to act, I brought him to every march, meeting, and sidewalk-flyer handout. Many of his earliest memories are of protest. To this day, he approaches the world with wide-eyed love and the belief that the right conversation can change the most stubbornly ignorant people. This worries me at times: He's attending school in the Midwest, on an athletic scholarship—he's a competitive bowler—and while I'm so excited for him, I'm so afraid of what will happen when his bigheartedness runs up against the bigotry suffusing conservative America.

Marcus has also been politically active for years. At eight, he joined me at city-council meetings, where I spoke against the proposal of a police precinct in our neighborhood. We celebrated when the plans for the new precinct were shelved. At ten, he joined a classmate to address the school board for his district, asking that it formally recognize the contributions of Edwin T. Pratt, the civil-rights leader and executive director of the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle who was working to desegregate our local schools when he was assassinated in our neighborhood in 1969. Today, Marcus is so proud to walk past the Edwin Pratt Early Learning Center on his way to school.

Marcus's faith in systems has not wavered, even after those systems were used against us. Last summer, white supremacists who were unhappy with my work documenting racism in this country targeted my family and me. Early one morning, someone called the police pretending to be Malcolm—they used his name—and reported that he'd just shot his parents. In fact, I was at a work conference. Armed police officers were sent to my home. The impersonator intended to bring the full violence of the state into my safest of havens by inciting officers to kick down my door, who themselves expected to confront a teenager with a gun.

We were lucky that morning: I'd recently received threats and had informed the police that my address had been compromised. The department knew to call me before its officers arrived. My door was not kicked in. But my sense of safety was shattered. And once the news spread, the threats only increased. Finally, we moved.

To me, my partner, and Malcolm, the experience underscored how often, and how easily, police forces are weaponized against Black people. To Marcus, it represented the danger of angry strangers—the "bad guys" from whom the police protected us.

One evening a few weeks after we moved, I left Malcolm and Marcus to get groceries. When I returned home, I fumbled with my keys while juggling the grocery bags. I opened the door to find Marcus, scared, holding a knife. When he saw that it was me, he quickly hid it away.

"What are you doing with that?" I asked, alarmed.

He said that he didn't know if I was a bad guy. He thought they may have found our new address.

Heart pounding, I explained that our new home was secure but that if the bad guys did find us, they would likely try to swat us again. And if the police arrived and Marcus came to the door with a knife, the officers would shoot him.

He chuckled nervously. "But I'm a little boy," he said.

I looked at my beautiful son, almost as tall as me already, with his beautiful brown skin and curly hair, and said, "A lot of cops won't see a little boy. They'll see a Black man with a knife."

Still, Marcus's faith persists. He so desperately believes that our systems can be saved. He so desperately believes that they deserve to be saved.

I do not share that belief. Some of that comes from communal exhaustion. But a lot of it comes from years of studying the deep roots of brutality and exploitation built into criminal justice, education, the economy, the government, and so many more of our systems.

I know that my anger, desperation, and even resignation are valid.

But so is Marcus's fire.

INSPIRED BY MY CONVERSATION WITH MARCUS, I'VE SPENT more time lately talking with, and listening to, young activists. These young people have come of age in the trauma of the murders of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Aiyana Jones, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. They have seen with their own eyes the brutality that our system seeks to bring upon them. They have every reason to be far angrier than I am. And they are angry. But they are so much more than that. They have seen us struggle, and the price we've paid for that struggle; they have seen the fire go out in our eyes, and they still decide that they, too, will try to change the world. They are sure they'll succeed. After more than four centuries of brutality and oppression, how amazing is yet another generation that demands revolution?

What an unfathomable tragedy to meet this wonderful gift with apathy and resignation.

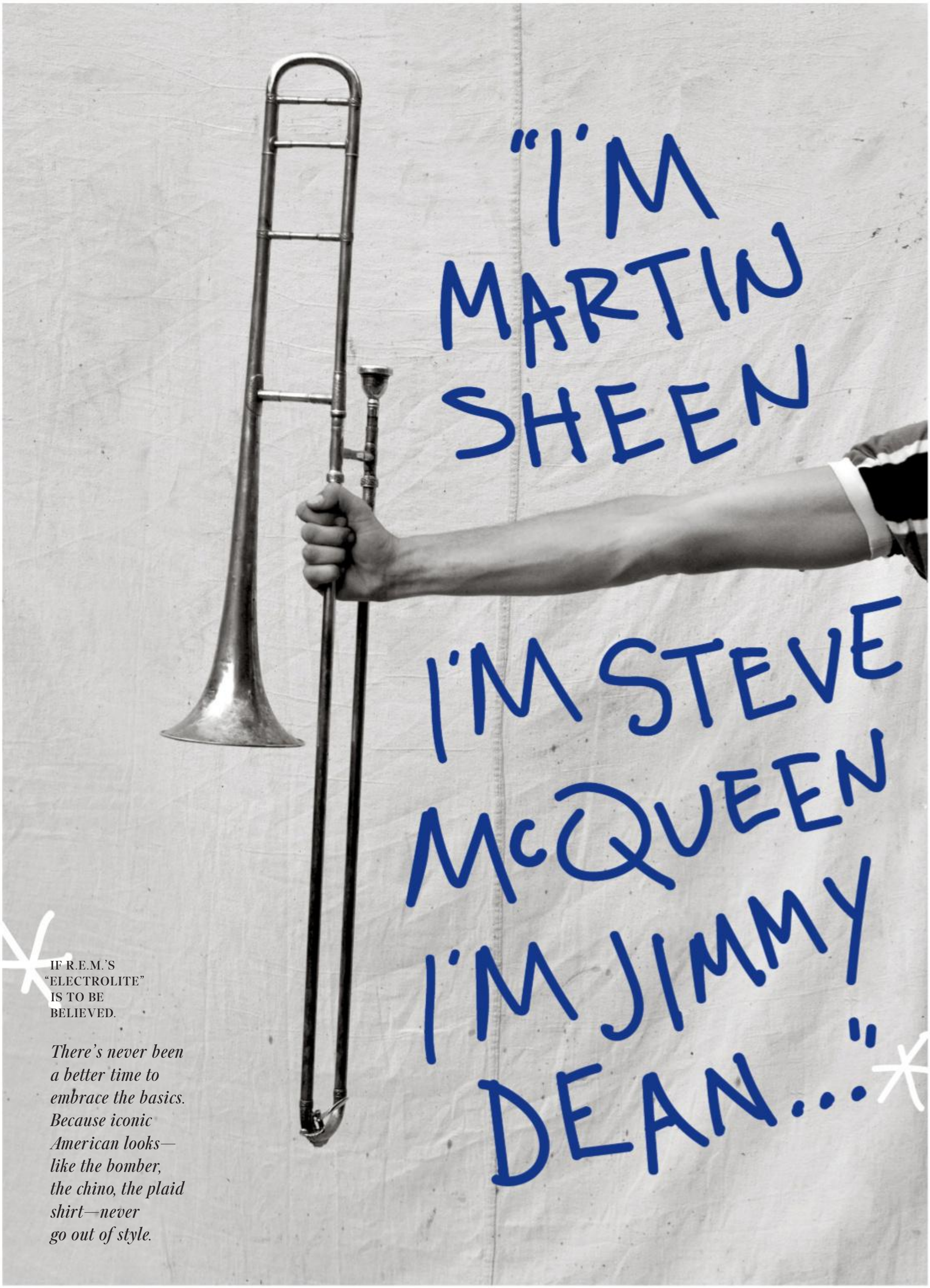
We have the chance to help our children in ways broader society didn't help us or those who came before us. To receive their fierce love with equally fierce respect. To meet their vision for change with material support. To advocate within our systems while the youth protest in the streets. To let young people's vision for a better future dictate how we leverage our power of seniority. To use our dollars, our votes, and our voices to dismantle policies that seek to harm them. To honor their commitment to fighting for justice. To teach them the heritage of Black resistance. To ensure that they feel they are part of something so much larger than themselves. To make clear that their lives matter.

When I talk with young people, they do not see me as jaded or out of touch—though I often feel that way. They see my work—my very existence—as hopeful. They remind me that I am still very much on my own journey, that I have not come to the end. A lifetime of resistance and disappointment need not break me, even if it has taken a real toll.

I STILL DREAD A FUTURE FOR MY OLDER SON IN WHICH PEOPLE fail him, and a future for my younger son in which systems fail him. But I've regained a sense of purpose that I'd lost. Some of the fire in my eyes has returned. And Marcus is responsible. He reminded me that for most of my life I operated from a place of love and possibility, and that love and possibility still exist.

I don't know how many people will still be in the streets when these words are published, or whether the enthusiasm of the many allies will have waned. But I do know that our children will still be Black, and they will still fight, and we will still have the opportunity to honor them by doing everything we can to support their fight for liberation.

How beautiful is that?



IF R.E.M.'S "ELECTROLITE" IS TO BE BELIEVED.

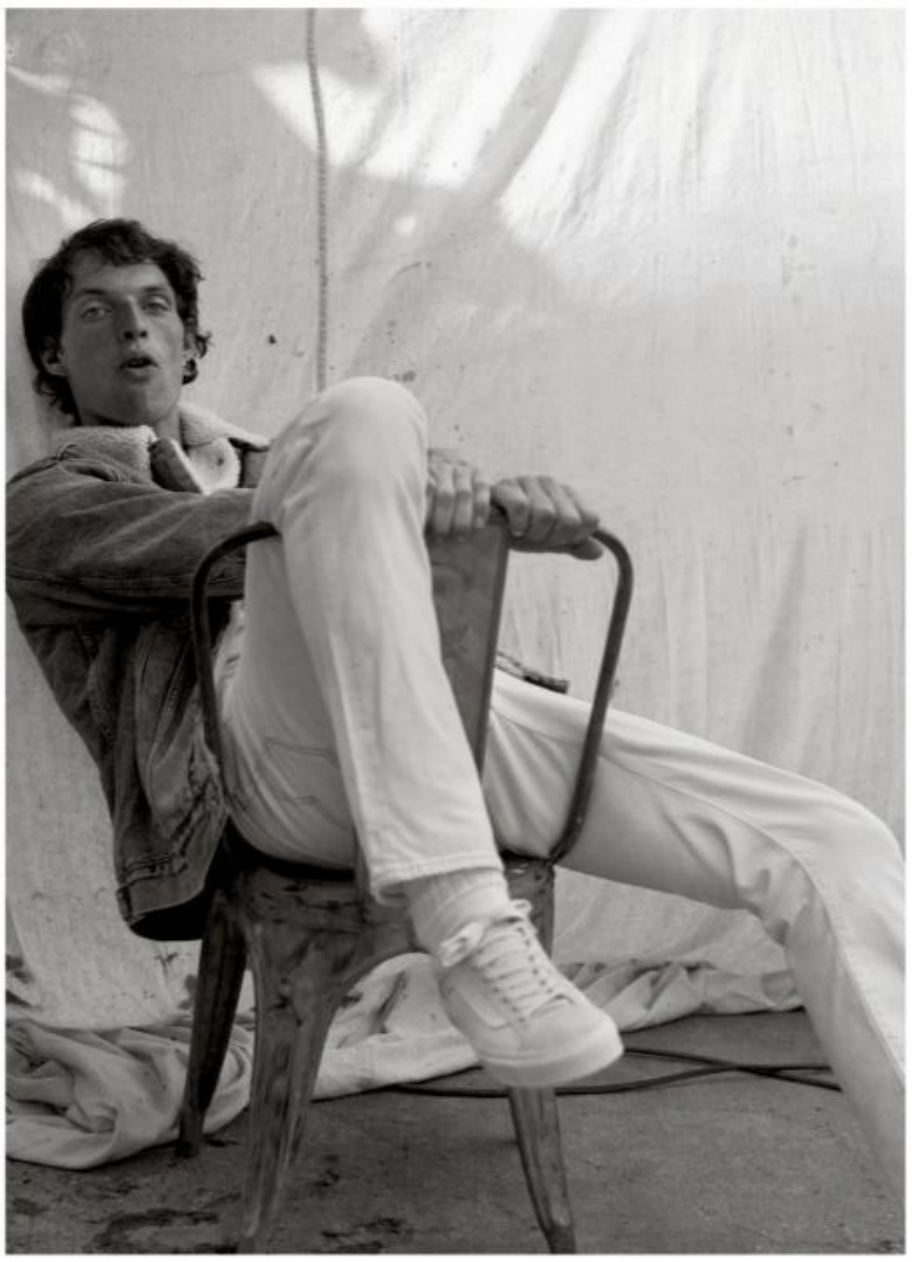
There's never been a better time to embrace the basics. Because iconic American looks—like the bomber, the chino, the plaid shirt—never go out of style.

Photographs by *Robbie Fimmano*
Styling by *Nick Sullivan*

JACKET ($2,498), SHIRT ($99), AND TROUSERS ($168) BY **POLO RALPH LAUREN;** BOOTS ($330) BY **RED WING HERITAGE;** BLACK BAY GMT WATCH ($3,725) BY **TUDOR.**

THIS PAGE: JACKET ($6,995), T-SHIRT ($345), AND JEANS ($995) BY **BRUNELLO CUCINELLI.** OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: JACKET ($128) AND T-SHIRT ($30) BY **LEVI'S;** JEANS ($168) BY **LEVI'S MADE & CRAFTED;** SNEAKERS ($60) BY **VANS.** JACKET ($850) AND SWEATER ($895) BY **MASSIMO ALBA;** TROUSERS ($340) BY **ISABEL MARANT.** 1960S U. S. NAVY G1 FLIGHT JACKET, **EBAY;** SHIRT ($298) BY **TODD SNYDER.**

NO
PARKING



SERVICE

SWEATER ($1,195), SHIRT ($345),
AND TROUSERS ($1,095)
BY **GIORGIO ARMANI;**
SNEAKERS ($60) BY **VANS;**
SOCKS ($12) BY **BOMBAS;**
VINTAGE HAT, STYLIST'S OWN.

JACKET ($2,295) BY **TOD'S;**
SHIRT ($760) AND BOOTS
($1,050) BY **ETRO;**
TROUSERS ($445)
BY **SLOWEAR INCOTEX.**

FOR STORE INFORMATION SEE PAGE 107.

THIS PAGE: JACKET ($3,850), SWEATER ($1,890), AND T-SHIRT ($250) BY **GABRIELA HEARST.**
OPPOSITE: T-SHIRT, TROUSERS, AND BOOTS ($895) BY **SALVATORE FERRAGAMO.**

POP STAR FOR THE DEMON HOURS

By Allison P. Davis _ Photographs by Jerald Johnson

Abel Tesfaye, aka the Weeknd, provides the soundtrack

for our fucked-up times

THIS PAGE: JACKET BY **PRADA;** T-SHIRT BY **JOHN ELLIOTT;** NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS;** HAT AND EARRINGS, HIS OWN. OPPOSITE: JACKET BY **GUCCI;** T-SHIRT BY **JOHN ELLIOTT;** NECKLACE AND RING BY **CHROME HEARTS;** HAT AND EARRINGS, HIS OWN.

ABEL TESFAYE, AKA THE WEEKND, IS DOING SOMETHING FEW people are letting themselves do right now. Something we've been avoiding for the past four or so months. It's thrilling, but a little dangerous even, considering how quickly the slippery slope could give way to an existential spiral. He's sitting alone in the Westwood condo where he's been holed up since March, imagining what he'd be doing right now, on a typical summer night on tour, in an alternate timeline. One that doesn't include a pandemic and varying degrees of lockdown and social isolation. He really shouldn't, but he's letting himself be seduced by the hypothetical.

It's 7:00 P.M. in L. A., where he is, but 10:00 P.M. on the East Coast, where, if it were normal times, he'd be making a stop on the tour for *After Hours,* his new album—which happened to drop on March 20, the same week the gates of hell fully swung open here on earth. If that hadn't happened, he'd be backstage, getting ready to perform before a twenty-thousand-person crowd at Boston's TD Garden. He'd have warmed up the band, and maybe now he'd be taking a preshow shot, or just swapping jokes with his crew right up until the moment the lights dimmed and he could hear the crowd, feel that little surge of energy he always gets right before he launches into the first song. He can't really describe it, but he's feeling it right now, like the tingle of a phantom limb. "I feel like my body was programmed and clocked to be onstage," he says with the wistfulness of someone describing mislaid plans with an ex.

The show—the whole tour—was going to be bigger, grander, more ambitious than what he's done before. He and his team had imagined a theatrical experience, like a three-act play or a rock opera telling the story of the character from the "Blinding Lights" video, a bloodied, beat-up man in a sharp red jacket, desperately trying to fuck, drink, drug (maybe murder?) his way out of heartbreak and into emotional maturity. It would be a new iteration of the Weeknd, one that would take him into the second decade of his career. If the concept for *Starboy,* his last major tour, was all about interaction with the audience—as he puts it, "getting them to play along and sing along and jumping with them, you know, mosh pitting"—then this tour would be about distanced storytelling. Not intimacy with the crowd or letting the fans get close to him but letting them witness an experience he's created. Less symbiotic, more parasitic. "The audience wouldn't really exist to me," he says. "I'd be in my own world."

At least some part of Tesfaye's plan came to fruition. He's in his own world, just in an inherently disappointing expectations-versus-reality version of it. With nowhere to go tonight, he's hanging out on Zoom with me. He signals his entry with a tentative "hello" that floats up from behind all of the open tabs I have blocking the window (an aspirational shopping cart from the Need Supply sale, several articles about safe sex in the pandemic, Twitter, *Billboard* charts, Wikipedia pages, etc.).

A few clicks and there he is, just a black-T-shirted torso at a desk, his Afro still shaped up like he hasn't missed a barber appointment, a diamond stud glinting in each ear. (He's long since cut off the hair writers used to spend paragraphs breathlessly describing.) He's in early-evening L. A., and I'm in New York, a fact he apologizes for by making sure to close the blinds so I don't get jealous of the sunlight still streaming through his windows.

"I've been trying to figure this out for the last ten minutes," he says by way of greeting.

Hasn't he been living on Zoom like everyone else?

"Yes," he responds sheepishly, "but I usually have somebody just, like, set it up for me and I just come in. Today, I'm solo dolo."

All incoming information about Tesfaye, from his publicist, from every profile of him ever written, indicates that he is incredibly shy. (This is always revealed as though it's something that's never before been said about a famous person.) He emerged on the music scene as a shadowy figure, so good at obfuscation that people didn't know if the Weeknd was a solo artist, a group, or a computer projection. The debate over whether he really is just this shy or is committed to a bit and is actually some goofy, loudmouthed extrovert has been fodder for magazine profiles since he became famous—like really, really famous—sometime in 2015. Five years later, he's won Grammys and American Music Awards, he's headlined Coachella, he tours constantly. He goes to fashion-week parties and has had two high-profile, blog-analyzed romances, with a supermodel and a mega pop star. He's worth tens of millions of dollars. The Weeknd has taken on a life of its own; it's a character separate from the man who inhabits it. But the expectation is still a shy, taciturn Tesfaye. As his persona as a performer evolves, there's a growing disconnect between who he is onstage and in his music and what he lets fans see of his personal life. It's hard to tell if he's trapped himself in a creative prison or if he's created a handy line of defense for himself.

In an attempt to meet him where he's at, we've agreed to start off discussing the five songs that he thinks define him, like we're historians studying the past to provide insight into the clusterfuck of modern times.

He prepared his choices before our interview, dispatching his publicist to send the list over a day early, like a dutiful student. And when the getting-to-know-you talk—in which I am, disappointingly, not invited to tour the condo—leads to the specifics of the songs, he perks up, his round face and cheerful, dark eyes a jarring contrast to the lyrics his publicist sent me, full of "*ooooh* yeah"s, models, and pussies.

The first song is "What You Need," from his debut mixtape, *House of Balloons,* a narcoleptic dream dirge on which he asserts, over and over again, that he might not be what you want, but he is what you need. The song came out in 2011, when his hair was growing into his famous Tim Burton-esque locks and he was folding shirts at a Toronto American Apparel. "Would you identify as a blipster?" I joke (I'm trying here), using a term that no Black person would use about themselves unless they were a masochist or a profound dweeb. He laughs and keeps going with the story. It's one he likes to tell about himself: He had dropped out of high school, had moved out of his mother's house in the Scarborough area of Toronto, and was living in a house with his friends in Parkdale, a grimy, cool neighborhood where he could throw parties, fuck around, take a cocktail of drugs, whatever. He was also composing songs, at first writing what he thought would be hits for pop artists to sing. But though he would soon help write songs for Drake's 2011 album, *Take Care,* he couldn't help but notice that he sang his songs better than other people.

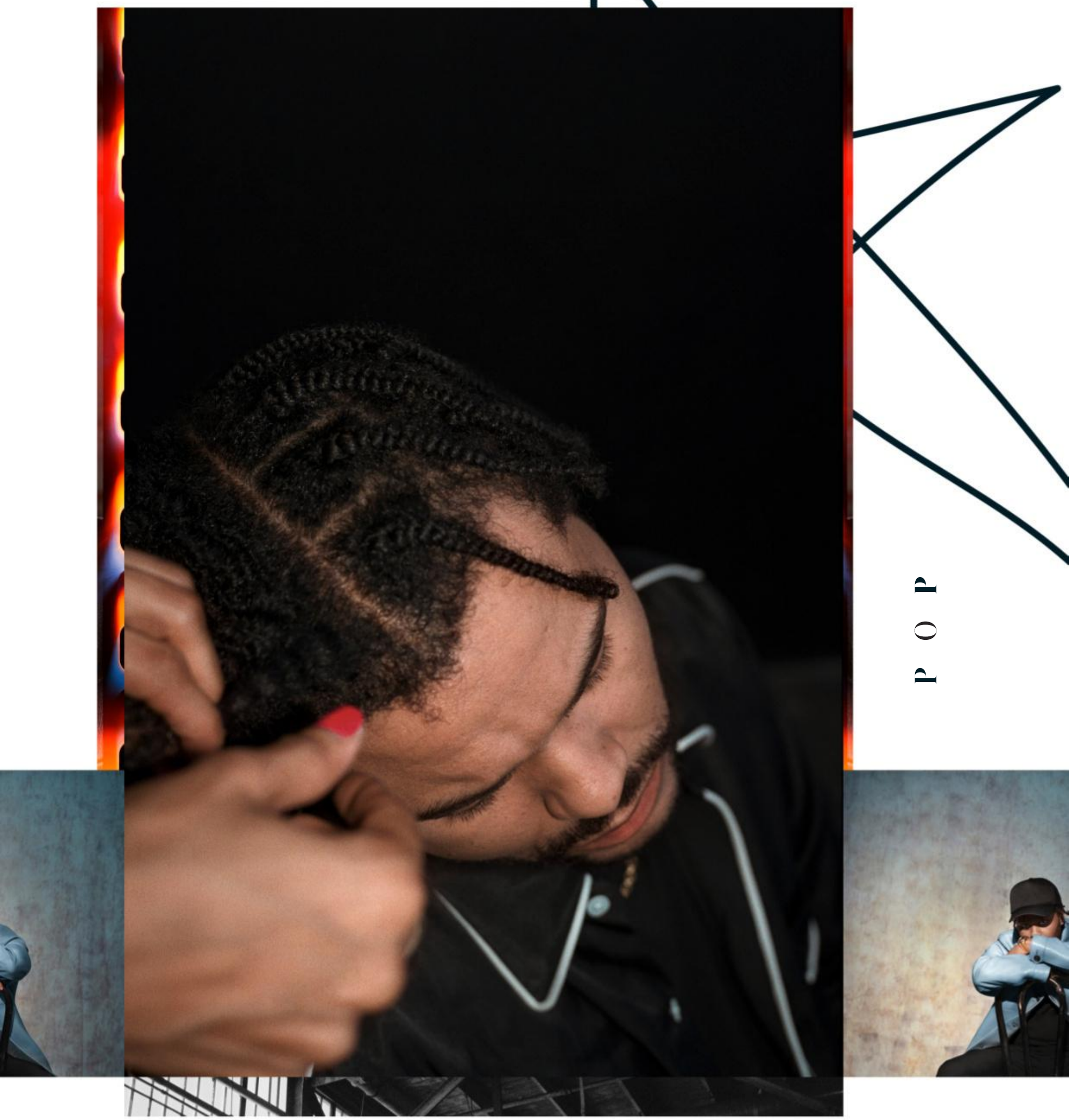
Tesfaye says he was writing the music he wanted to listen to at the time. He was sick of sped-up EDM and figured if he wanted to hear slowed-down music from a sadboy who fucks, others probably wanted—no, needed—to as well. He takes his due for propelling that shift in the music landscape.

In a recent *Variety* interview, he pointed out how similar Usher's 2012 single "Climax" is to his own early music, recalling the first time he heard it and sensing that it was directly inspired by his unique sound. He mentioned he found it flattering but also got "angry." ("Climax" producer Diplo later confirmed that he was indeed influenced by Tesfaye's early stuff.) The comment got an indirect response from Usher—a video of him performing the falsetto acrobatics the song requires—and launched #ClimaxChallenge on Instagram, which entertained people for a few days, as did the whisperings of a feud between the two performers.

But it wasn't a feud, Tesfaye says, annoyed that anyone thought otherwise. "I hit him up to apologize and tell him that it was misconstrued. He's one of the reasons why I make music. Definitely. No, no, I have nothing bad to say about Usher. The sweetest, most down-to-earth guy ever."

Sometimes he played his own music on American Apparel's stereo system. Everyone was feeling it, he says, but nobody knew that they were folding stretchy miniskirts and tube tops right alongside the guy who was on the store's speakers. In time, *House of Balloons,* along with his subsequent 2011 releases, *Thursday* and *Echoes of Silence,* became cult favorites. Fans responded to his indie-R&B Jordan Catalano vibe, and the recalcitrance became part of the allure.

It wasn't an act, he says, or a gimmick. He just didn't like the limelight. "I wasn't too confident with how I looked. I didn't think that I could sell the music looking like me," he explains. He didn't put his unobscured face on his album covers and wouldn't talk to reporters. "I was very hardheaded. To this day, I don't think I've ever done a radio interview. I just feel like I would give a horrible interview."



POP

SHIRT BY **NICHOLAS DALEY;** T-SHIRT BY
JOHN ELLIOTT; NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS.**

He had no doubts that the music itself was good, however. Like, good enough to sell out amphitheaters and stadiums, so that's where he set his sights as an artist. Could it be that his veneer of bashfulness was in service of that grand ambition? In a 2015 *Rolling Stone* interview that doubles as his oracle, Tesfaye told the reporter, "I think that's why my career is going to be so long: Because I haven't given people everything."

So "What You Need"—what does this song mean to him? Is it about hiding in plain sight? The fear of owning his full power as an artist? What's the meaning of need when it comes to artistry?

"No real meaning. Just a sexy R&B song."

THE SOUND HE INTRODUCED ON HIS FIRST THREE MIXTAPES, WHICH were later repackaged and rereleased as *Trilogy,* earned him a record deal and his first studio album, 2013's *Kiss Land,* along with that cult following. It's from *Kiss Land* that he chose the second song in his five-tune biography, "Wanderlust."

I ask him what it felt like to experience a new rush of fame. What was going on emotionally back then?

He doesn't remember the exact emotions he was feeling.

At the time, he told *Complex* the song was about touring, and about not quite knowing who he was as a person, and about an honest-to-God fear he was having (it was inspired by horror-movie makers like John Carpenter) regarding fame. "Wanderlust" has the feel of a transition song: We hear hints of the poppy, synth-heavy anthems to come, but it clings to that *House of Balloons* sound. It didn't *not* work, but it didn't quite work, either. He realized a few things after that: He wasn't much of a performer and needed to tour more, and if he wanted to sell out twenty-thousand-seat arenas, he needed some help engineering a pop song.

He asked the studio for guidance. The next three songs he chose as defining songs (a cheat; he tried to sell them as one choice by using slashes)—"Love Me Harder," the duet he performed with Ariana Grande in 2014; "Often," from his second album, 2015's *Beauty Behind the Madness;* and "Earned It," from 2015's *Fifty Shades of Grey* soundtrack—were the result. The difference between "Often" (a platonic Weeknd track) and the other two (one a pop anthem helmed by the legendary Swedish hitmaker Max Martin and the other a radio-friendly track for moms who love softcore) shows how he was studying. How he was trying to take what worked from his stuff (i.e., endless synonyms for the way the female anatomy responds to his sex appeal and complicated feelings around disrespectful hookups) and make a hit. He did: It was the first time he'd ever heard multiple songs of his on the radio in rotation at the same time.

This was perhaps the moment his personalities split, or at least came to a fork in the road—if his discography allows for some role-playing as armchair psychologist here. He could remain a cult favorite and go down the path of *Beauty Behind the Madness,* or he could take the route that would lead him to stadium tours, with 2016's "Starboy," his final choice in the little biography we're constructing together.

The song was an immediate earworm, a Daft Punk/R&B-electropop hybrid all about the extravagances of a lifestyle that Tesfaye was certainly enjoying, fully, at the time. He had shed a certain trademark vocal quality—the one that made him sound like he was singing through a cocaine-fueled post-nasal drip. This new voice was polished till it gleamed. His lyrics were a calculated sort of raw—a version of sentiments that had been on songs like "The Hills," sanded down for mass consumption. The song indicated a total, and necessary, evolution from an old version of himself to a new one (Tesfaye's Ziggy Stardust or Sasha Fierce). It wasn't a subtle transition to what the media dubbed his "Michael Jackson phase," a comparison that didn't sit well. "There was like a backhanded thing [to the comment] that didn't feel genuine. It felt like they were setting me up for disaster," Tesfaye says. "I wanted to transcend. I wanted the music to transcend."

I'm surprised that he ended his five-song biography there, with a song that came out in 2016, when—

"Well, you only gave me five songs," he counters when I point this out.

Whether he wanted to include it in his biography or not, *After Hours* has the song that feels more intentionally autobiographical than anything he's ever released before: "Snowchild," a softer track about his Toronto years, his come-up from *House of Balloons* to Hollywood, and the things that make him uncomfortable about fame.

He calls the song "a period piece": "I just wanted to make my *Dark Knight Returns.*" The comic-book reference (and the Easter-egg-filled video, a collaboration with the first Black-owned animation studio in Japan, D'ART Shtajio, featuring an animated Tesfaye) gives it the emotional distance of a superhero-character origin story. It's almost personal—almost.

True to his core, he still demonstrates astonishingly inventive ways to describe sex (he "give[s] her Philip K. Dick"), but he sings with a new earnestness about everything he wants to leave behind: a $20 million mansion in Hidden Hills, for example. He put his famed nine-bedroom estate on the market, the oft-mentioned manifestation of his reluctance to be in the public eye. (It's the type of place you live in if you're rich and don't want to be seen. You have a pool, and a spa, and a basketball court, and enough rooms for the homies if you never intend to mingle in the real world.)

"All that house, it was never really me," he says now. He's swapped the manse in favor of the Westwood condo. "Well, the whole floor of a condo," he says. These days, mostly it's just him and his dog, Caesar, a big Doberman who thinks he's people. "He's a sweetheart, but he's super protective. He'll warn me if somebody's nearby."

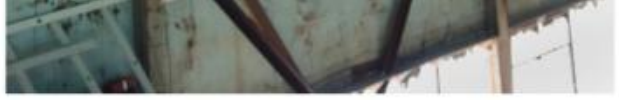
IN JANUARY, HE PUT ON THE RED JACKET THAT WAS MEANT TO BE THE trademark costume for *After Hours* and performed the most popular single, "Blinding Lights," on *Kimmel*. March 7 was the last time he'd perform it before a live audience, at a taping of *SNL*.

The album came out when cities were on lockdown. Spring was a chum bucket of collective anxiety, overwhelm, isolation, and heartache followed by a summer of continued uneasiness, plus necessary explosive social and racial uprising. Ambulance sirens seemed to be the only fitting soundtrack. Tesfaye considered, for a nanosecond, postponing the album but ultimately decided to release it. He figured his fans needed a distraction in these weird times, and he ended up with an album that is preternaturally appropriate for being stuck in the house, sweating, panicking, masturbating, and despairing.

Sonically, who is better suited, really? He's got this seraphic voice that lulls you into songs about the faded late nights and underworlds where all of our deviant impulses propagate and turn us into demon versions of ourselves. Overall, critics have called *After Hours* his best album yet, though some complained that it was too Max Martin slick when we could have used moody and hushed, too produced when we needed raw, too fast when we needed slow (though that's not really the Weeknd's fault; pop music of all moods has been speeding up). But even at his most moms-can-hum-it-too, his lodestars have always been unrest, loneliness, and angsty horniness. Those who listen to the Weeknd fervently or even ambiently weren't surprised that the album contained a track poppy enough to be the song of the summer and psychotic enough to be the song of *this* summer. Even when he's entering a new phase of who the Weeknd is, he remains the modern bard of our most fucked-up times. For the first time in a decade, he feels like he's accomplished what he set out to do after *Kiss Land*. He conquered the mercurial synth-wave sounds he's been experimenting with his whole career. He has finally, at least musically, blended the two parts of himself together: the ambitious, shined-up arena-tour pop star and the narcoleptic fuckboy (both still equally profane). His falsetto soars to high notes that threaten to crack, much like our psyche on a day-to-day basis.

"Blinding Lights," he says, is about "how you want to see someone at night, and you're intoxicated, and you're driving to this person and you're just blinded by streetlights, but nothing could stop you from trying to go see that person, because you're so lonely. I don't want to ever promote drunk driving, but that's what the dark undertone is."

Three days before the song dropped, Tesfaye broke a five-month Instagram silence to announce that more new music was coming. "TONIGHT WE START



JACKET BY **OFF-WHITE C/O VIRGIL ABLOH;** T-SHIRT BY **JOHN ELLIOTT;** TROUSERS AND LOAFERS, **CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE;** NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS;** HAT, HIS OWN.

A BRAIN MELTING PSYCHOTIC CHAPTER LET'S GOOOO," he also tweeted. (This was in November, but an evergreen tweet, really.) By June, the song was Spotify's most streamed song in the world, surpassing 1 billion plays.

"It's eerie. It's a little . . ." he says when I mention that the song, the tweet, made him seem like a psychic. "It makes me feel like there's always, like, a higher being or some powerful beyond being that's kind of, you know, walking me through life. So yeah, I mean, it is eerie. It's weird."

He's got whiplash right now if he's being honest, because even with everything that's been happening, he has to admit that he's happier than ever. "I can stop worrying, aside from what's going on in the world, which sucks that I can't really enjoy my happiness, you know?"

There's a natural if morbid curiosity about what celebrities are doing in their homes when they can't leave them. Tesfaye's interior life doesn't have the same dog-walking-on-its-hind-legs quality to it that Drake's Toosie Sliding around his louche mansion has; or Henry Cavill's uploading videos of himself in a tank top, delts on full display, building a computer, has; or Martha Stewart's thirst-trapping from a pool in the Hamptons has. Any fantasy about Tesfaye ordering women or drugs or both to a mansion during the pandemic is (disappointingly?) just fanfic.

He's been working, he says. Really. Writing and recording new music by himself and for other artists. He plays video games, but mostly for research. He's a film nerd—he makes references to movies on every album—so naturally, he's watching a lot of them. (He just saw the Korean thriller *Burning* after so many people recommended it to him.) He's working on two screenplays, but his ambitions for them are modest. He wants to make small, independent films and maybe write roles for himself to play—maybe.

But it's not like he's just sitting alone in a condo with Caesar, writing music and ignoring real life and its consequences. Recently, Tesfaye made a very public gesture in the form of major donations. He gave $1 million to various relief efforts to assist with the pandemic and $500,000 to various Black Lives Matter groups. It wasn't his first time doing so, but he released a statement about artist responsibility, and about the debt the music industry owes to Black creators. What about his own experiences as a Black man in the industry, and in America? Has he experienced racism?

"I probably have, you know? I probably have for sure. But I try to focus on making it about the music and trying to succeed," he says evasively. Yet he does admit that while Canada has its own issues with race, they really are nothing like America's, which are more overt. He has an incredibly tight crew that seems to offer him some protection. "We just don't rely on others to get us where we need to be," he says.

FROM TOP: TROUSERS BY **PRADA;** RING BY **CHROME HEARTS;** WATCH, HIS OWN. SHIRT BY **NICHOLAS DALEY;** T-SHIRT BY **JOHN ELLIOTT;** TROUSERS BY **BOTTER;** NECKLACE BY **CHROME HEARTS.** JACKET, SHIRT, TROUSERS, AND TIE, **CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE.**

Tesfaye just had his first IRL hang the week before we spoke. He reunited with a few of the crew he mentioned, including La Mar Taylor, his longtime friend turned creative director. He hadn't seen them since the *SNL* taping. "There was absolutely no fighting it," he says suddenly, surprisingly earnest. "We hugged each other." It wasn't even a very extravagant hang. They simply sat together talking, basically re-creating their group chat in person.

He's embracing the time, the simplicity, that comes with a life reduced to grocery-store runs and not much else. He also turned thirty earlier this year, and he reports feeling what most people feel at that age: He's content. He's got friends and family he appreciates. He's learning to let go of things that don't serve him. Perhaps he's not ignoring the real world, really; it's just that he's tightened his ranks, and his existence, so that he controls what comes in and out of his world.

What about his reclusiveness? Is that worth abandoning? Does he still need it? Tesfaye thinks for a moment. "The older you get, the longer in your career . . . you know, I let go of it a lot. Sometimes I go back to it, because I miss it."

The light has shifted, the sun that was streaming in has disappeared, and he's been sitting half in darkness for a while, his face shrouded like on one of his old album covers. It's very dramatic.

But then he stands to turn on a light, fully revealing his bedroom, which sort of looks like a hotel room—flat-screen TV on the wall, white bedding. Reflexively adjusting to the flood of light exposing everything, he lets me know he has only a few minutes left, quickly wrapping up the call.

MAYBE IT'S THE GIVEN SITUATION, IN A PANDEMIC THAT IS MAKING Intimacy with a capital *I* a concept worth a second glance. Is it odd to demand intimacy from anyone? Especially a celebrity? Yes and no. Before Tesfaye was this, he was a hushed presence singing the most deviant, secretive feelings and thoughts—his own and other people's. He sang about millennial sexual discontent the way Taylor Swift sang her diaries—building an expectation from fans that they now can't shake: that the songs are for them, that the music videos and lyrics are riddled with Easter eggs for them. Maybe he is just a guy who wants to play video games and write screenplays and be left alone, but the experience of him is intimate. His secrecy promises expansiveness and sparks a desire to figure out what's behind it—is it something that needs to be protected or nothing more than a justified, quotidian quest for privacy?

So, a few days later, we're talking on the phone and I finally ask him about his reluctance to elucidate things that are so well discussed in the press. Isn't it better just to clear them up in his own words?

He pauses and seems uncertain about how to respond.

"I don't know, maybe. Maybe it could be that if I feel like I'm reiterating or answering the same question, but I feel like, to me, it's like, Oh, okay, well, let's talk about something else. Yeah. Give them something else to talk about, you know? Let's not keep going back and giving them the same headlines. I mean, I know there's so much more to me, and there's so much more to the music, and there's so much more to everything."

At this point, if he's going to address his past, Tesfaye seems to want to do it through parody. He's even gone so far as to guest-star in an episode of *American Dad!,* playing himself, but animated and . . . a virgin. It's a joke that lands best if you've, well, experienced his magnetism firsthand. I, for example, once saw Tesfaye perform live at a MoMA garden party and was shocked to find myself blown away by the force of his sexual power onstage. I surprised myself and my date by screaming until my throat was raw. Rather than let others ridicule him as a guy who once said straight-faced in a *Rolling Stone* interview, "I've had a lot of sex," he's purposefully holding his past self up for mockery—it's one way to move past selves that don't suit us or define us anymore.

He did it again by gamely playing a caricature of his earlier self in the 2019 Safdie brothers movie *Uncut Gems.* In the film, he dons a wig of his old hairstyle ("It was so hot all the time"), goes to 1 OAK, and has a bathroom hookup with Julia Fox (a good friend of his). I ask him if he could ever go back to any version of that person. "No. I mean, I didn't really say anything outlandish. I mean, we were all eighteen-year-old blip-blip kids, as you call it." (He means blipster.) "I'm just growing up now, maturing, learning."

Playing the Weeknd as a character feels like the equivalent of the mansion in Hidden Hills—another way to stay guarded, distant, to put miles between himself and the rest of the world. He stops to consider why he's let the Weeknd take on a separate life of its own. He seems stumped.

"I'm a writer. Sometimes I write a song and it's not in my head. I'm writing it for someone else, but then I end up singing it. I want to write a whole album for a female artist. I have a whole vision of the Weeknd. But I guess it's like . . . it's the same reason why I want to write for someone else?"

But come on: People have to wonder if this lyric is about that or if this song is about this; was this line, three minutes, twenty-four seconds in, about that Met Gala appearance? When he sang, "I just fucked two bitches 'fore I saw you" on "The Hills," fans are going to want to know: Does he call women bitches? Did he really just fuck two of them on the way to fucking another (which seems like the sexual equivalent of eating a Double-Double before going to a steakhouse)!? How does he reconcile some of the more misogynistic things he says, like calling women bitches, all the time?

Tesfaye asks me to repeat myself in a way that makes me think the surprise of hearing his own lyrics read out loud to him may have forced him into something he's never considered—but my video has just frozen. So I ask again: "What of the 'bitch'?"

"It's definitely a character. When you hear some of the drastic stuff, you can tell. I mean, that's why it's tricky, because it is me singing the words; it is my writing. It's like you want people to feel a certain way. You want them to feel angry. You want them to feel sad. You want them to feel. It's never, like, my intent to offend anybody."

This brings us to an album he definitely didn't mention in his five-song bio, 2018's *My Dear Melancholy.* It was a surprise drop between album cycles that felt more like *House of Balloons* than ever. Fans declared, "The old Weeknd's back." The album cover, with his face obscured, red, emerging from a shadow, felt familiar. Sonically, it was a throwback: twenty-two minutes of concentrated, raw pain; dark and sexually aggressive deep beats that hovered at the RPM of very stoned sex, not dancing in a club; lyrics sung like the feeling was so urgent he'd explode if he didn't get it out. (It took him about two and a half weeks to write, record, and release the whole thing from scratch.) A perfect breakup album.

It was also peak "Let's speculate about what's going on here," because the album exists in a world where an assumed timeline of Tesfaye's high-profile relationships has taken shape, where he stopped dating Bella Hadid and was romantically involved with pop star Selena Gomez, who then went back to her ex Justin Bieber. There are multiple blogs dedicated to which lyrics are assumed to be about Hadid ("I hope you know this dick is still an option. . . . You were an equestrian, so ride it like a champion"), which are about Gomez ("I almost cut a piece of myself for your life"), and which are about himself ("Ima fuck the pain away, and I know I'll be okay").

He dances away from questions about what was going on at the time, or even what he was feeling, in nonspecific terms, but he calls the album cathartic. "The reason why it was so short is like, I think I just had nothing else to say on this . . . whatever . . . . It was just like this cathartic piece of art. And yeah, it was short, because that's all I had to say on this situation," he says, widening his eyes.

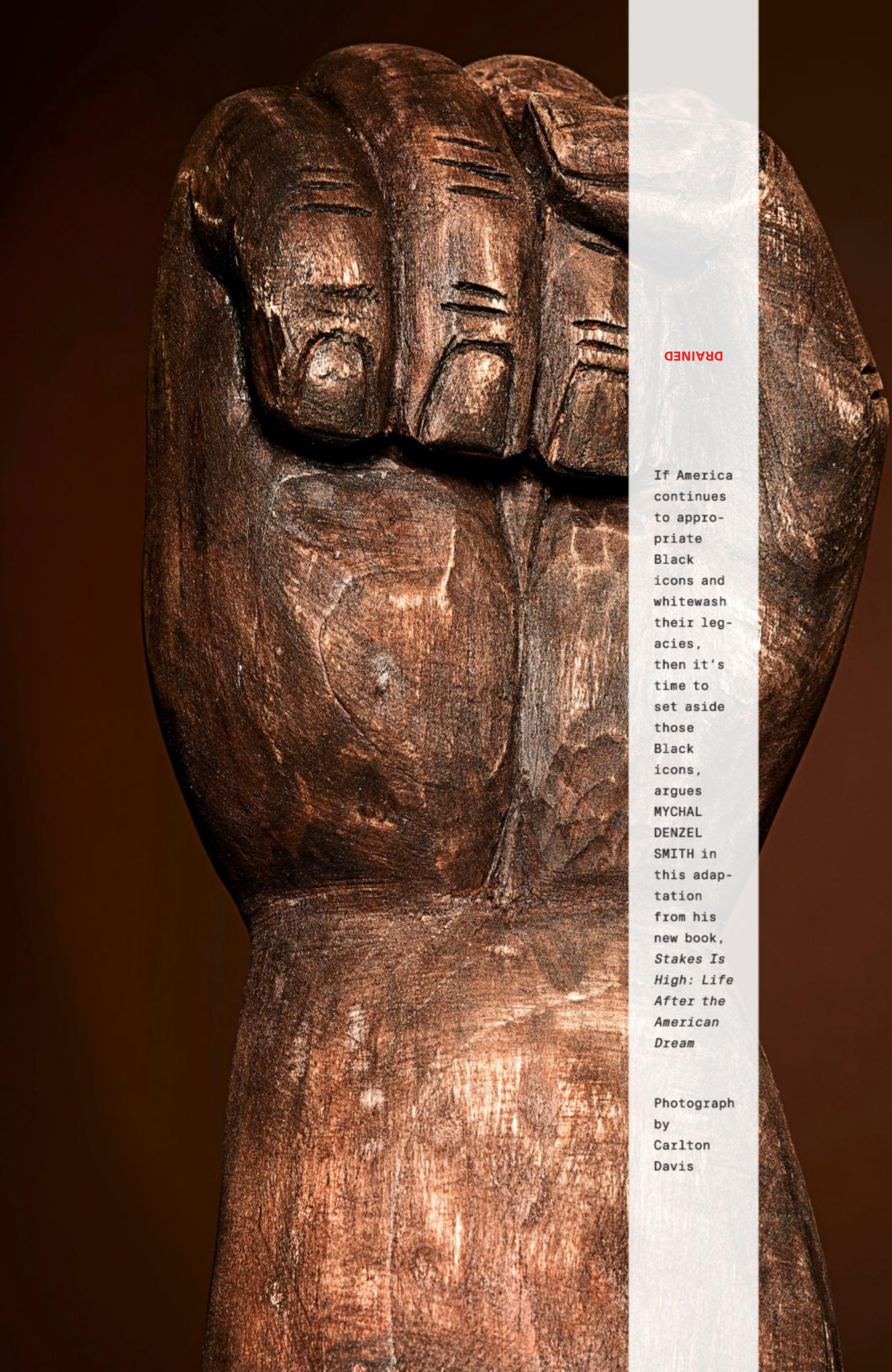
Did it make him feel better?

"Yeah, of course. I mean, that would have sucked if I didn't."

I bring up the fact that he scrapped a whole "upbeat" album in favor of *My Dear Melancholy.* What made him do that?

"It's not my first time. I've scrapped so many records!" he responds.

Tesfaye becomes comically taciturn around this kind of thing, never combative, sometimes contrite, mostly just demonstrating that he understands that this is a game, and he's refusing to play, with commendable stubbornness. I choose to be direct and ask who, if anyone, this album was about. I receive the rarely enacted, truly disconcerting "No comment." He says it sweetly, almost apologetically, but with the finality of a steel gate dropping over the window of a store.



DRAINED

If America continues to appropriate Black icons and whitewash their legacies, then it's time to set aside those Black icons, argues MYCHAL DENZEL SMITH in this adaptation from his new book, *Stakes Is High: Life After the American Dream*

Photograph by Carlton Davis

SITTING IN A ROOM SURROUNDED BY FRIENDLY BLACK faces for his inaugural Black History Month breakfast, in 2017, Donald Trump rattled off a list of notable Black Americans, and when he mentioned Frederick Douglass, he noted that Douglass was an "example of someone who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more." Douglass had been dead for 122 years.

Trump is not alone in butchering Douglass's legacy. Walking from Morningside Heights to get across Central Park one morning, I passed the Frederick Douglass Houses, where there is a placard with a well-known quote from Douglass: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." Forget Trump's ignorance. Here was, perhaps, a greater danger. Because for as long as that sign has been there, the project's poor, mostly Black residents have been greeted by this cherry-picked, context-free quote.

Douglass had been insisting that the struggle to abolish slavery would require more than an appeal to moral correctness. There would come a need for confrontation, an unsettling of the peace. "Power concedes nothing without a demand," he said.

Now, in this neglected place, those same words no longer urge action but project admonishment. Struggle and you will be rewarded, the message seems to say, but you must struggle.

This nation co-opts our heroes of insurgence, distorts their legacies into symbols of American exceptionalism—just a few more names to add to its monoculture of hot dogs and oak trees and pickup trucks. Part of the American delusion is that we pretend these cultural touchstones sprang forth independent of ideology. This is how America bolsters its belief in its own moral authority.

I AM AN AMERICAN, FRAUGHT AS THAT DESIGNATION IS, and not simply because I was born here. Nor just because the wealth of this nation was built by my ancestors' labor, though it is that, too. It's because America is my inheritance, and I am a product of American thinking. I want to own my place within the system.

Early on, my political identity was shaped in direct opposition to this view. "I'm not an American," Malcolm X once said. "I'm one of the twenty-two million Black people who are the victims of Americanism." Malcolm believed, and for a long time so did I, that the only people with a claim to an American identity were those who enjoyed its privileges and were spared its ugliness.

What I have come to accept is that being a victim of Americanism and a product of it are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is the inescapable course for those of us who are not white, male, cis, hetero, and wealthy. Even as we suffer under the boot of oppression, we are not immune to indoctrination. The promise of a free, equal, and just America, in which your destiny is yours to control—it begins to sound plausible. Maybe it hurts too much to think that your future is controlled by anyone else. So you believe. You believe, at times, against your better judgment. You believe because you want to survive.

I have no interest in being a patriot. I am not concerned with the viability of "America." My concern is always for people. It happens that the people here, on this land, call ourselves Americans. Any attempt to fashion a future beyond it must deal with this identity and the reasons we have attached ourselves to it.

Dr. Martin Luther King reached for those commonalities in his appeals to end segregation and disenfranchisement. He pointed to this country's founding documents and asked not that white Americans change their values but that they live up to them. This did not make him popular, but it did position him as the more "reasonable" alternative to those who called for revolution.

Except it could not last. Years of this work took a toll on the man, exposing him to the depth of the erosion of the American spirit. In 1967, exactly one year to the day before he was assassinated, Dr. King stood in Riverside Church, here in New York City, to deliver his most forceful denunciation of the Vietnam War. He came to understand that these issues not only intertwined but spoke to something corrosive in the soul of this country.

The whitewashing began almost immediately upon his assassination. Whereas two years before he was killed, 63 percent of Americans held a negative opinion of him, now the politicians and institutions that had stood against his work while he was alive embraced his symbolism in death. Over time, this ensured that his words and example could be used to fuel American patriotism.

The holiday cemented this. On November 2, 1983, Ronald Reagan signed Martin Luther King Jr. Day into law. "We've made historic strides since Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus," Reagan said at the time. "As a democratic people, we can take pride in the knowledge that we Americans recognized a grave injustice and took action to correct it."

With that, he effectively defanged Dr. King's legacy.

Now Dr. King is treated as an American triumph. The activist has transformed into just another character in this nation's fable, and his accomplishments have been recast as those of a democratic, tolerant people—never mind that it was the bigotry and violence of the American people that made Dr. King's work necessary.

The man himself had warned against this very thing. After JFK's assassination, Dr. King wrote in an essay published in the journal *Transition,* "It is not necessary to create myths and legends about John F. Kennedy. It would diminish him because the facts abundantly honor him. There is the danger that in abstract exaltation his memory will shine brightly for [a] time and then fade."

ONE FUNCTION THAT MYTHS SERVE IS TO LIMIT THE parameters of our imaginations. The infallibility of Dr. King's legacy is related to the message he has been chosen to deliver, his words reduced to grade-school bromides. He's used as a tool to divert attention away from structural inequality and injustice.

Any attempt at reclamation must contend with his usefulness to the system. Restoring his radical legacy will make him as unpopular in death as he was in life.

What, then, to do with Dr. King? We could let him go. We could stop turning to him in times of distress, stop arguing with those who have never read his work, stop inviting the celebration of his hollowed-out memory. Stop making him a piece of it at all.

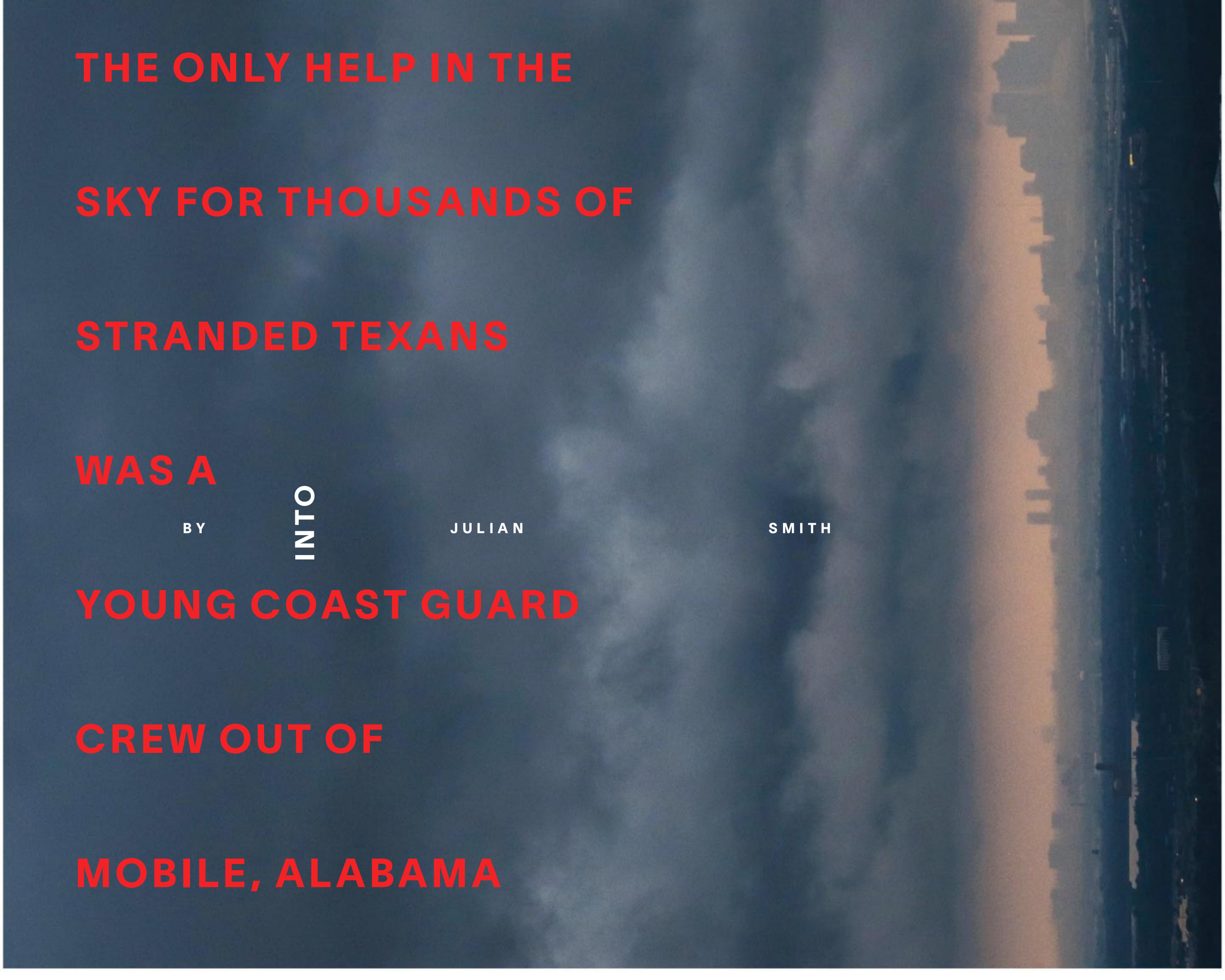
At least for a time. Long enough so that when we return to him, no longer will he be so useful to the system that killed him.

Adapted from Stakes Is High: Life After the American Dream *(Bold Type Books), out September 15.*

THE ONLY HELP IN THE SKY FOR THOUSANDS OF STRANDED TEXANS WAS A YOUNG COAST GUARD CREW OUT OF MOBILE, ALABAMA

BY JULIAN SMITH

INTO



W

FOR THE FIRST SEVERAL
HOURS OF
HURRICANE
HARVEY'S ASSAULT ON
HOUSTON,
THREE YEARS AGO
THIS AUGUST,
STORM
THE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2017, 0300

SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2017, 0300

Fifty feet above Pasadena, a working-class city on the southeast border of Houston, Coast Guard rescue swimmer Tyler Gantt crouched in the cabin of a hovering helicopter and readied himself for the first mission of his career. Violent gusts from Hurricane Harvey knocked the aircraft in every direction and drove rain through the seams of its fuselage. It felt like a roller coaster that could jump the tracks at any second.

The moment aviation maintenance technician Chris Flores slid open the side door, water began pouring into the cabin and a bolt of lightning lit up the scene below. Cars up to their roofs in water lined the streets. Power lines and trees whipped in the wind. *Holy crap,* Gantt thought. *This is it.*

By the week's end, Harvey would dump more rain than any other hurricane on record in the United States. Rescue efforts would be equally historic, carried out by more than thirty-one thousand first responders from across the country. But at the moment, Gantt and his crew were the only help in the skies over Houston.

Their first mission was to evacuate several people from a home surrounded by floodwaters. In a brief lull between rainbands, Gantt quickly clipped into the hoist cable and Flores lowered him to the ground. Gantt wore his standard-issue yellow helmet and thin, red sleeveless wet suit. He carried a knife, a radio, and chemical light sticks. The water was thigh-deep and much colder than what he'd expected from the Texas summer.

He could barely make out the house numbers through the darkness and the downpour. He waded toward what he hoped was the right house and pushed open the door. "Coast Guard!" he called out. "Anyone here?"

The people he found inside ranged in age from young kids to seniors. To keep dry, the children sat on a table balanced atop a couch. Gantt asked if this was everyone. Yes, they said. Was anybody hurt? No.

Gantt triaged the most urgent cases, a man with diabetes and a boy with special needs. He led them outside and to a steel basket attached to a cable that hung from a hoist above the door of the helicopter. Gantt helped the man and the boy climb into the basket, and Flores brought them up.

Gantt waded back inside the house and told an elderly woman it was her turn. He helped her walk slowly outside and gave Flores a thumbs-up to send down the basket. But without warning, the helicopter flew off.

As he and the woman watched the aircraft recede into the night, Gantt heard the pilot's voice on the radio strapped to his shoulder: Hoist malfunction. We'll be back. Hang tight.

Gantt led the woman back inside the house and explained the situation to the family. "So, you've done this before, right?" another woman asked.

Gantt, twenty-three, had endured six months of punishing training to become a rescue swimmer, graduating the year before with four others in a class that had started with twenty-four. He knew how to pull panicked sailors from foundering ships in heavy seas. That's part of the job for enlistees in the U.S. Coast Guard, the military branch tasked with protecting and policing the nation's waters. But he wasn't trained to carry out urban search and rescue, let alone in the fourth-most-populous city in the U.S., in a hurricane.

"Oh, yeah," Gantt said, hoping he'd live up to the confidence he tried to project. "A whole bunch of times."

SATURDAY, AUGUST 26, 1100

The day before, at the Coast Guard Aviation Training Center in Mobile, Alabama, the crew had gathered for the first time: Gantt; Flores, thirty-six; and pilots Lieutenant Greg Bukata, twenty-eight, and Lieutenant John "J.J." Briggs, thirty-seven. Harvey had strengthened to a Category 4 hurricane the previous day, and ATC Mobile's commanding officer was sending them to Texas to

MARCUS YAM/*LOS ANGELES TIMES*/GETTY IMAGES (PRECEDING PAGES, FLOODED HOUSES).

JABIN BOTSFORD/*THE WASHINGTON POST*/ GETTY IMAGES (HELICOPTER)

First responders rescued more than 120,000 people during Hurricane Harvey. The volume of calls for help quickly overwhelmed the city's 911 system.

assist the two aircrews on duty at Air Station Houston. Don't get too excited, he said. Earlier that morning, the storm had made landfall two hundred miles south, at Rockport, and brought torrential rains and 130-mile-per-hour winds that had peeled off rooftops and tossed trailers end over end. But it had slowed and weakened considerably, so their trip could turn out to be a "nothing-burger." That word stuck with Gantt.

They prepped an MH-65 Dolphin, the sleek, red all-weather helicopter that serves as one of the Coast Guard's primary search-and-rescue aircraft, and took off around noon, followed shortly behind by another crew, also in an MH-65D. This was the first mission they'd gone on together. On the five-hour trip to east Texas, they laughed as they swapped stories of the crazy things they'd seen on prior missions. Gantt mostly just listened.

By the time the Mobile crews landed at Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base, fifteen miles southeast of downtown Houston, rain was already spitting down hard. Two more aircrews arrived from New Orleans, and one of the Houston crews was reconnoitering weather conditions south along the coast. Operations Officer Scott Sanborn, the acting second-in-command, ordered the crews to rest up. Gantt's crew set out in a rented Chevy Suburban, checked into a hotel, and found a pizza joint a few miles from the base. They were about to tuck into dessert when Briggs's phone buzzed. It was Sanborn. The situation was deteriorating faster than anticipated, and rescue calls were starting to come in. He urged them to head back before the roads flooded completely.

They were the only crew that could make it back immediately. After a few hours' fitful sleep in the station's bunk rooms, Briggs woke them around 2:00 in the morning. His phone had buzzed him awake—Sanborn again. After crawling inland, the storm had stalled, sucking up warm water from the gulf and dumping it in an unprecedented deluge. The worst of the rainbands swirling out from Harvey's center were parked directly over Houston, which is built on marshy flatlands. The severe rainfall, trapped by paved expanses and fed by overflowing bayous, was flooding all across the city's 665 square miles.

Despite the early warnings, Houston's mayor, Sylvester Turner, advised residents to shelter in place instead of evacuating, in the hope of avoiding the deadly traffic jams that had occurred in the lead-up to Hurricane Rita in 2005. It was a decision that would later be widely condemned.

The volume of calls for help quickly overwhelmed the city's 911 system. Texans took to social media, appealing for help via Facebook and Twitter, Instagram and Nextdoor. People were trapped in attics and stranded on roofs. Ambulances evacuating patients were being stopped by the rising waters. One woman posted a photo to the Houston Coast Guard's Facebook page of four children lying on the counter of a flooded kitchen. "LIL GIRL ON A VENTILATOR," she pleaded. "PLEASE SEND SOME HELP QUICK."

Ground-based rescue teams responded to as many calls as they could—the Texas National Guard, Houston police, task forces from around the country. Civilians took part, too: The Cajun Navy, a loose group of volunteers that had formed in the high waters of Hurricane Katrina, arrived with their own boats from Louisiana. But some residents couldn't be reached by land or water. They needed help from above.

Coast Guard regulations prohibit crews from flying in thunderstorms—it's right there in the Air Operations Manual—but the situation was so dire that Sanborn gave Gantt's crew permission to launch anyway. They have a saying in the Coast Guard: There's no rank in the helicopter. Everyone in the aircraft has to agree that the potential gain is worth the risk before the aircraft launches. This applies throughout the mission. If a crew member decides it's time to go home, that's what they do.

Each one of the Mobile crew had to ask himself if the number of lives in danger, increasing with each passing minute, outweighed the risks of flying in the hurricane. All four said yes without hesitation.

A handful of serious cases were clustered in Pasadena. When the doors of the hangar rolled open, the crew members were greeted by a wall of rain falling from a low ceiling of black clouds. They could barely see the launch zone, let alone the quarter mile ahead that Coast Guard regulations declared the minimum of visibility. They had to tow the helicopter through a foot of water to reach the launch zone.

As pilot-in-command due to his seniority, Briggs directed the mission. He sat in the front-left seat. Bukata, in the front right, would do the flying. He started flipping switches to fire up the aircraft. The rain pounding on the fuselage was so loud that it muffled the sound of the engines and rotor blades. In the cabin, Gantt double-checked the oxygen canister, bandages, and pressure dressings in his EMT kit and tried to steady his nerves. Flores ran through the preflight checklists, which included making sure the hoist was operational.

They launched at 2:30 A.M., alone in the sky.

SUNDAY, 0300

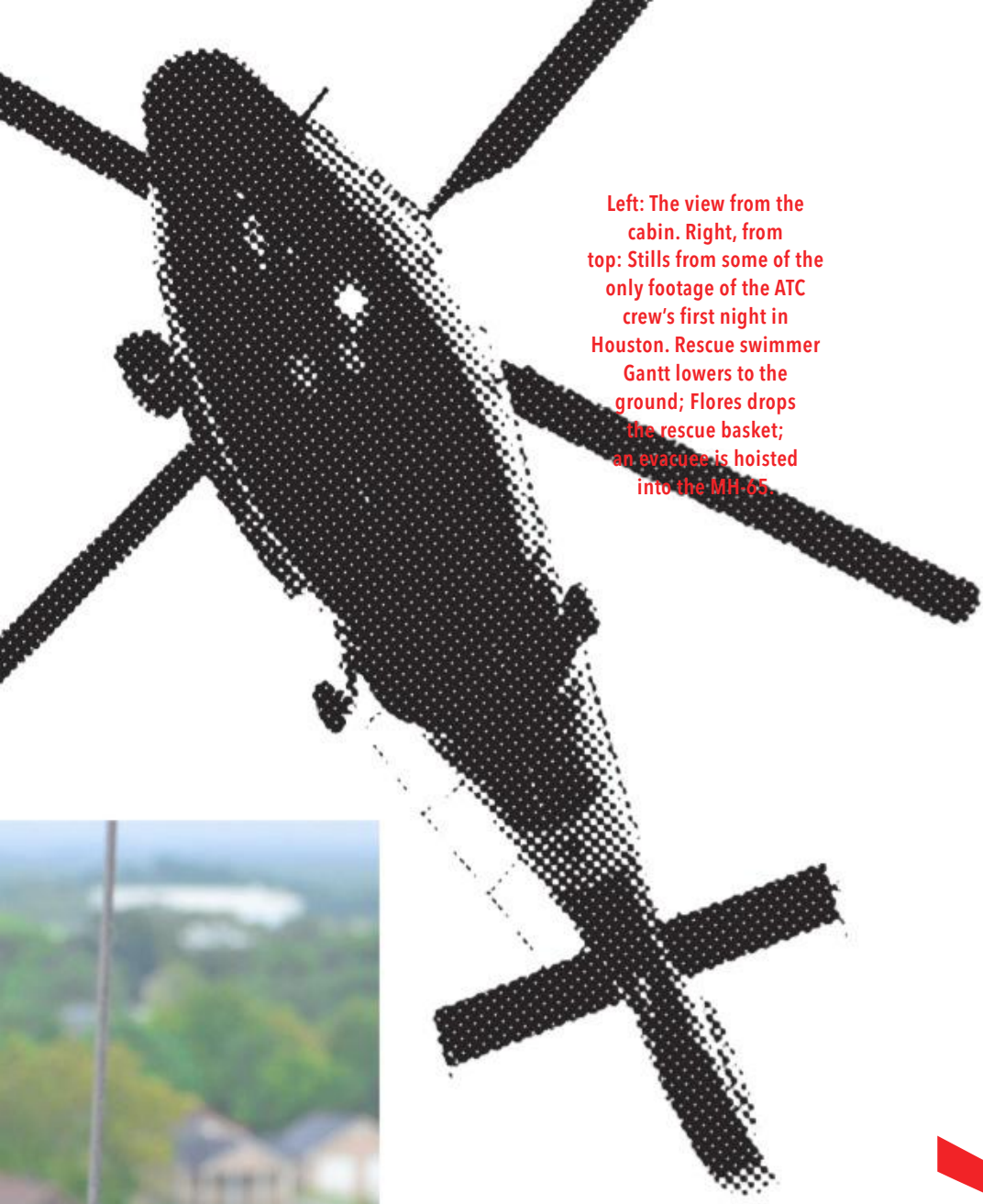
Between them, Briggs and Bukata had more than three thousand hours of flight time, most of that in MH-65's. But neither of them had flown in conditions remotely like these. Every time they punched through a rainband, winds soared as high as ninety-two miles an hour and visibility dropped to zero. Gantt and Flores were whipped back and forth in the dark cabin, listening to the whine of the rotors shift abruptly as Bukata tried to maintain his altitude and airspeed. Sometimes he had no choice but to stop and hover, waiting for the worst of the weather to pass.

As helicopters go, the MH-65 is the equivalent of a sports car: fast, agile, finicky, and cramped. Its most distinguishable feature, an unusually large tail fin, leaves it vulnerable to wind, and a sloppy left turn can send it into an uncontrolled spin. Even in clear skies, it's easy to become disoriented in a helicopter and feel like you're turning or falling when you're not, a phenomenon called the leans. It is all but essential that pilots rely on the aircraft's sensors and gauges.

Bukata flew at an elevation of one hundred feet, low enough to catch glimpses of the ground but also low enough to hit a light tower. Straining to see through the rain in their night-vision goggles, he and Briggs navigated flooded highways over a city none of them knew well. At times, the crew members had to pull out their phones and use Google Maps to help figure out where to go—another breach of regulations.

At the house, Gantt loaded the man and the boy into the basket, and Flores brought them up. Both were soaked and scared, and the boy was screaming. Yelling over the roar of the aircraft, Flores tried to reassure them, but his words didn't seem to have an effect. Maybe they couldn't hear him. Flores could

COURTESY OF U. S. COAST GUARD (CREW MEMBER, BASKET RESCUE).
NICK OXFORD/REUTERS/NEWSCOM (HELICOPTER).



Left: The view from the cabin. Right, from top: Stills from some of the only footage of the ATC crew's first night in Houston. Rescue swimmer Gantt lowers to the ground; Flores drops the rescue basket; an evacuee is hoisted into the MH-65.

barely hear Bukata and Briggs. The onboard electronic systems, including the radio, were starting to short out from all the water in the cabin.

Gantt reemerged with the elderly woman and gave Flores a thumbs-up: Ready to hoist. But when Flores tried to send the basket back down, the mechanism froze up. He tried his best to fix it, but nothing worked. He shouted to the pilots that it was beyond repair. Up front, Bukata was fighting to keep the helicopter steady as water sloshed four inches deep around his boots. Warning lights flashed all over the cockpit. Finally, he made out what Flores was saying. Bukata barked out something between laughter and hysteria. "Sir, are you okay?" Flores yelled. Bukata didn't reply. He turned the helicopter around and started back toward base. When the radio briefly crackled to life, they told Gantt what had happened.

As they flew back to base, the screens on the center panel flickered. Flight displays, comms, navigation—all displayed nonsensical data or simply went black. Essentially, Bukata was flying blind.

Luckily, Briggs's altitude indicator still worked. That was enough for Bukata to fly them back in more or less one piece. Both pilots were amazed they didn't crash. "It was the first time I felt my own mortality," Briggs said. "At one point I thought, *I've had a really good life.*"

The other ATC Mobile crew that had flown to Houston still hadn't been able to drive back to base, and their MH-65 sat empty. As Flores made sure the man and the boy were settled safely in the air station, Bukata and Briggs prepped the other helicopter. Flores climbed in, and they took off.

In Pasadena, Gantt had been waiting with the remaining survivors for an hour, doing his best to keep everyone calm and answering questions about what they could bring with them. "Only wallets and medications," he said. "No, not that framed photo of your mother."

The crew returned, and they resumed sending up family members one or two at a time. As Flores lifted Gantt and the last survivor, clipped together in the rescue harness, he temporarily lost sight of them in the sheets of rain.

SUNDAY, 0400

The crew refueled while Gantt helped off-load the evacuees. For the next rescue, the pilots asked him to choose between a pregnant woman trapped in a flooded attic and a man clinging to a flooded bridge. It felt strange, being given that much responsibility so soon. There's nothing in the manual that says what to do when you're in the middle of a hurricane. But he was the only one on board with EMT training, and Briggs trusted him to triage. Gantt chose the woman, and they sped back to Pasadena. In the brief moments that the ground was visible, they saw the faint glow of flashlights and cell phones—each one a stranded survivor, waving for help in the darkness.

On the ground, Gantt half swam from door to door. "Is there a pregnant woman here?" he shouted into the wind.

"My neighbor across the street," a man called back.

Gantt went into the one-story house across the street. In the attic, he found the woman huddled with her husband and their baby girl. The woman told Gantt she had a surgical incision on her stomach that needed to stay dry. But the only way out was through the filthy water. "Get them out of here," the husband said.

Gantt helped her down the attic ladder and out the front door. The water was up to his chest, so he folded her over one shoulder and wrapped his arms around her legs. He found a high spot in the yard and radioed for the rescue harness. It was faster than the basket and could lift them from a standing position, helping to keep the woman out of the water. Once they were clipped in, Flores hoisted them up 120 feet and into the helicopter.

Gantt lowered back down. The father shouted that he intended to stay behind to shore up the house. Coast Guard protocol dictated that the decision was his. Gantt would need to take the infant up himself. As the father walked out the front door to make the handoff, he slipped and began to fumble the baby. Gantt lunged and grabbed the girl before the flood could sweep her away. If the father said anything, it was lost in the roar of the wind and the rotors.

By now they were well past "bingo," the point at which the helicopter had

enough fuel to safely fly back to base. There was no time to lower the basket, and rescue harnesses aren't exactly designed to fit infants. Gantt would have to hold the baby in his arms. A physical grip, as it's called in the Coast Guard, is a maneuver of last resort, most often used to quickly move a person out of danger—from a cliff face, out of pounding surf—to a safer spot where they can be hoisted by basket or harness. Here, it was Gantt's only option.

Flores knew they were much too high to bring both up safely. "Down," he told Bukata. "We gotta go down!" In his twelve years as an aviation tech, Flores had never been more frightened when making a hoist. Bukata slowly lowered the helicopter below the power lines. That low, wind from the rotors can bounce off the ground, kicking up loose objects and making the aircraft even harder to control.

Gantt felt the brief sensation of weightlessness as the cable drew tight and lifted them into the air. The baby hadn't made a sound the entire time. He moved to cover her eyes, but a tiny fist bumped his hand away, as if to say "I want to see." They looked out on an archipelago of abandoned cars surrounded by dark water. The storm was still raging, but to the east, black clouds were starting to ease toward gray. Sunrise was coming.

SUNDAY, 0700

After dawn, other aircraft began to fill the sky. Pilots set down anywhere they could: highways, fields, the Lowe's parking lot. The crew from ATC Mobile was grateful for the help. But the air traffic brought a new kind of chaos. Radio frequencies were overrun, and with new aircraft from different branches of the military arriving every hour, it was almost impossible to organize flight plans.

Sometimes a crew would arrive at an address to find that the people they had come to rescue had already been saved. Or two helicopters would hoist survivors on the same block at the same time within a rotor's length of each other. The only way to avoid a collision was to eyeball it. A crew from New Orleans swung their steel basket into a power line. Incredibly, there were no crashes. Nobody even swapped paint.

For the Mobile crew, the missions became a blur: launch, hoist, return, offload, refuel with the engine running, launch again. Later in the morning, as they flew over the suburbs of east Houston, Flores spotted a man standing on a rooftop, pounding it with a two-by-four. Bukata hovered and Gantt dropped down. As he approached, the man shouted, "My family's in there!" He'd managed to break open a small hole, but the water was up to the gutters and rising.

Gantt had been in such a hurry that he'd left his chain saw back in the helicopter. "Stand back!" he yelled into the hole. He squatted down, stuck his hands inside, and lifted. Shingles and plywood splintered. He threw aside the debris and kept going until the hole was large enough to fit through. He dropped in and found a family of nine in knee-deep water. Two babies were strapped into car seats and placed atop a stack of boxes.

Gantt helped one person at a time climb out of the hole and into the basket that Flores kept lowering and raising. After the fifth or sixth hoist, Gantt looked up and wondered, *Where are they putting all these people?* By the time it was his turn, the gutters were underwater. Inside the cabin, every surface was occupied. People were sitting in his and Flores's seats, in one another's laps, on the floor, in the basket. He found a space near the door to crouch. "It was a clown car," he said—one more remarkable moment in a night full of them. The helicopter was so heavy that it dipped toward the water before Bukata could get enough lift to fly away.

SUNDAY, 1200

SUNDAY, 1200

The Mobile crew finished at noon, soaking and spent. In less than ten hours, they had carried out about a dozen missions and rescued fifty-four people.

The Ellington air base was teeming with crews and survivors. Gantt texted his parents to tell them he'd survived his first mission. Flores called his wife in Mobile. She had been up most of the night watching the Weather Channel as their children slept, more worried than she had ever been in his career. It was a huge relief to hear his voice.

The roads had cleared enough that the crew members could drive back to their hotel. On the way, the adrenaline started to ebb and hunger took over. They passed an Indian restaurant that was surrounded by water but still open. They were the only customers. Barely able to keep their eyes open, they devoured naan and tikka masala. The magnitude of the night's events was just beginning to sink in. "We were all in shock about what we had just done," Flores said.

MONDAY, AUGUST 28–WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30

That was the only time the four flew together as a crew. Flores helped repair helicopters for a couple days, then arranged to go home to Rockport, Texas, where his father and uncle had insisted on riding out the storm. They were fine, but there was a lot of cleaning up to do.

Briggs and Bukata flew together one more day. This time, Briggs was in the pilot seat. They launched in the late afternoon toward a cluster of emergency calls in northeast Houston. They arrived to find dozens of people waiting for help, some with life-threatening medical conditions. It took three runs to an improvised landing spot on a highway near the convention center to get them all. On the final run, Bukata watched the fuel gauge edge toward empty as the swimmer and the flight mech brought up the survivors. Every additional pound cut the distance they could fly. The hoists kept coming, but somehow the weight wasn't adding up. "I kept thinking, *Am I doing my math right?*" he said. He looked over his shoulder. The cabin was full of babies.

They made it back to the convention center on fumes and counted heads as the evacuees offloaded. The final tally: ten infants and four adults. With the four crew members, that made eighteen people at one time, historic for an MH-65, the Coast Guard said.

Near midnight on Tuesday, as Harvey finally began moving away from Houston, Gantt headed out with a crew on his last mission of the week. Their destination was an assisted-living facility in the Kingwood neighborhood, where an eighty-year-old woman on hospice care needed to be evacuated. She had a broken hip and neck, and Gantt would transport her to the hospital.

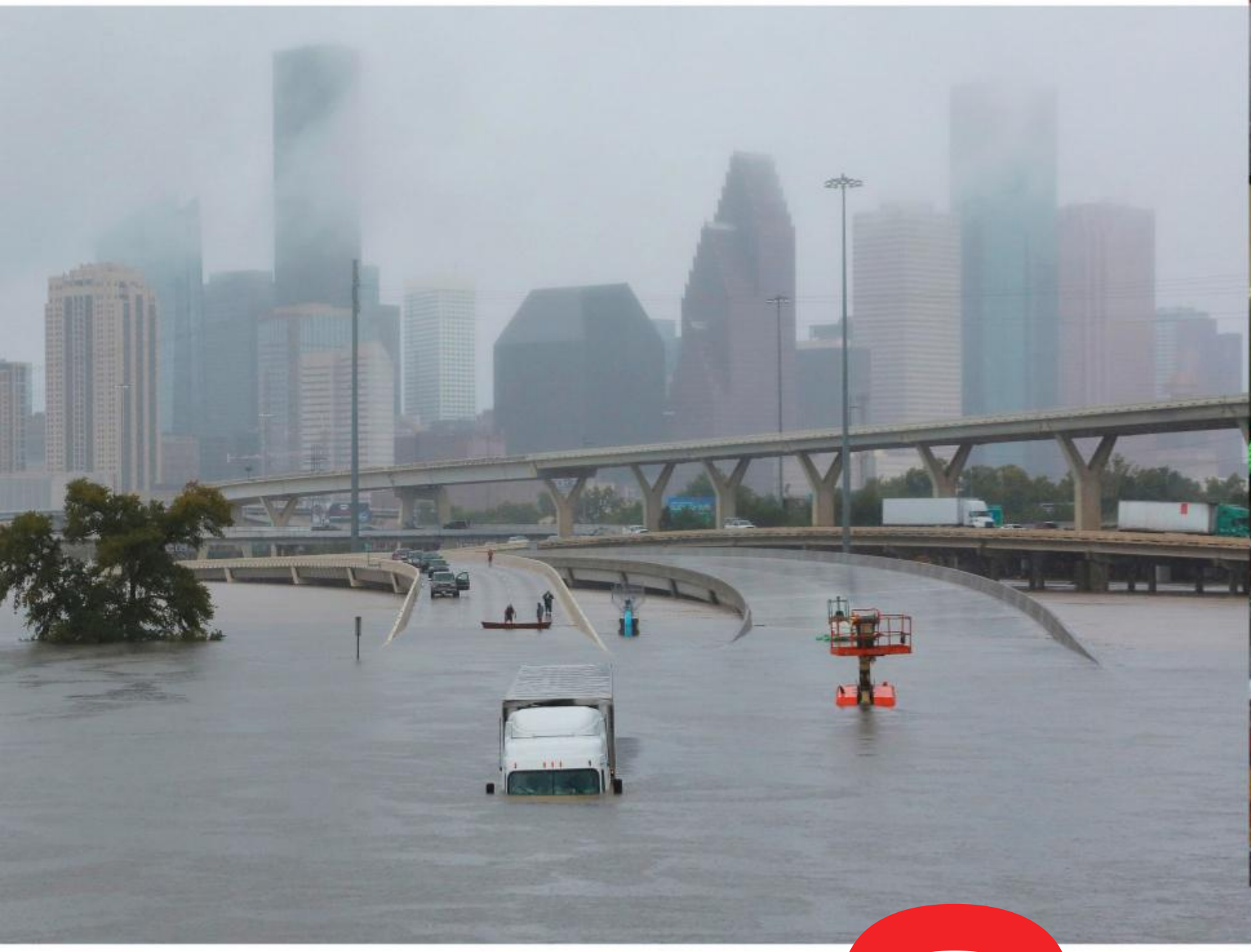
Inside the facility, two feet of water filled the hallways. He found the woman with her two daughters. They and a nurse were the last ones left. As they waited for the aircraft to refuel, the daughters, in tears, told Gantt that they were afraid this would be their last memory of her.

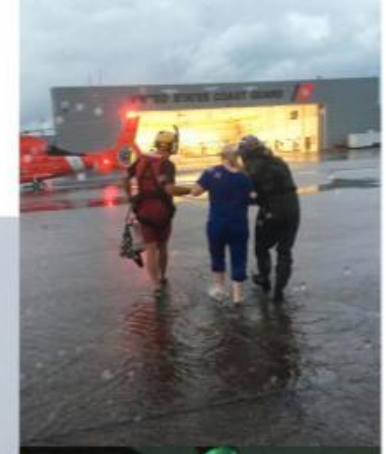
Once the helicopter returned, Gantt strapped the woman to a backboard and brought her outside. He attached the backboard to the rescue basket. She went up, then he followed, and the women watched their mother fly into the darkness.

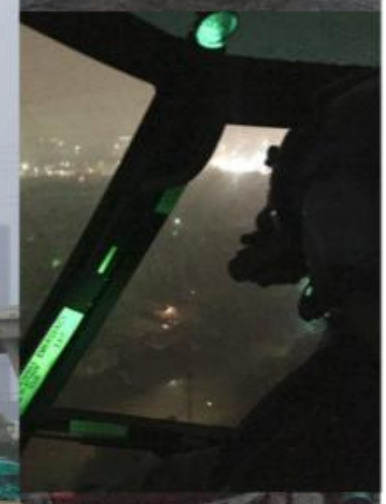
2020

Harvey meandered along the coast and made its final landfall in Louisiana on August 30 before dissipating over northern Kentucky. The hurricane killed at least seventy people, half of them in Houston's Harris County, mostly due to drowning. It caused as much damage as Katrina—roughly $125 billion worth. First responders rescued more than 120,000. The Coast Guard alone saved 11,022 people and 1,384 pets.

A trillion gallons of water fell on Harris County, so much that by one estimate, the weight of it pushed Houston down two centimeters. Two counties







Above: So much rain fell upon Houston that by one estimate, the weight of it pushed the city down two centimeters. Right, from top: Images taken by the Mobile ATC crew. Gantt and Flores help off-load an evacuee at daybreak; to see at night, pilots Bukata and Briggs relied on night-vision goggles; a mother, seated by Gantt, protects her child's ears from the roar of the engine and the storm while Flores, in the blue helmet, sits forward.

RICHARD CARSON/REUTERS/NEWSCOM (FLOODED HIGHWAY). COURTESY OF MOBILE ATC CREW (REMAINING).

over, the city of Nederland received the most rain that week—five feet of it, a new U.S. record. Harvey was the harbinger of five other hurricanes—including Irma and Maria—that made September 2017 the most intense hurricane month in U.S. history. That record may not hold for long. Climate change has created the conditions for stronger, and likely more frequent, storms. As the planet warms, the atmosphere holds more moisture, which translates to heavier rainfall.

Although Harvey affected all Houstonians, its impact was unevenly distributed. According to a study released last year by the National Academy of Sciences, the city's poorest residents are most likely to live on the lowest-lying land, and therefore most at risk of flooding. The region's patchwork recovery has only deepened its entrenched disparities. In the wake of the storm, relief funds have favored homeowners, most of whom are white, and not renters, most of whom are people of color. Facing rising premiums, residents, especially in vulnerable communities, may choose to forgo flood insurance; in the five years prior to Harvey, coverage in Pasadena dropped nearly 20 percent. Today, Harris County's inadequate flood-control infrastructure remains a work in progress. When the next hurricane arrives, the region could face another catastrophe.

For their work in the skies over Houston, Briggs, Bukata, and Gantt were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the military's oldest aviation award for heroism in flight. Flores received the Air Medal, given for a single act of heroism. He had helped rescue 54 people; Gantt, 59; Bukata, 108; and Briggs, 120.

Briggs still thinks about the people they didn't save, all those lights glowing in the darkness. A decision to turn right or left could mean the difference between life and death. "Did we fly over houses where people were trapped? One hundred percent," he said. "That's the stuff that keeps you up at night."

Amid the chaos, Coast Guard personnel weren't able to record the names of every person they rescued. Understandably, everyone involved was more concerned with getting residents to safety than exchanging email addresses. A quick thank-you, maybe a grasp of the hand, was usually the extent of it.

Gantt did go back to Mobile with one name: that of the woman he'd evacuated from hospice care, so that he could identify her to hospital staff. Her name was Carolyn Hoppas. He couldn't get her off his mind. And her daughters—were they able to track her down? Two days later, he found a woman on Facebook named Jennifer Hoppas Hyde. He sent her a message:

"Hi Jennifer, is your mother Carolyn Hoppas? I was the rescue swimmer that took her to the hospital. I just wanted to let you know that she made it there safe and sound and I hope you all did too. She did great on the ride over there, a little scared I'm sure but I held her hand the whole way over and made sure she was comfortable. Prayers are with you and your family."

Hyde responded immediately: "You are making me cry. Thank you for finding me!" The day Gantt delivered her mother to the hospital, Hyde continued, "she sadly passed away. . . . It hurts so bad. But you have just lifted my spirits more than you will ever know."

THE LONG

When a young, Black, Yale-educated Democrat named JAIME HARRISON emerged as a genuine threat to unseat Senator Lindsey Graham in 2020, the incumbent's many detractors took notice—and forked over piles of cash. But will it be enough in ruby-red South Carolina?

BY CHARLES P. PIERCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGORY CASTEL

AROUND THE TOWN OF ORANGEBURG, IN THE MIDLANDS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, THE days had retractable fangs, like the copperheads in the woods and the water moccasins in the river. The fangs came out at night, gleaming in the moonlight through the canopies of Spanish moss. Jaime Harrison heard the story from his grandmother Jimmie Lou, who, with his grandfather Willie, helped raise him. Jimmie Lou told him about what it was like when she was coming up in and around Orangeburg, where the family home was, and where the fangs of the night were ever present, and where nocturnal menace was as general as the still, humid air.

"It was a fear that I'd never seen in my grandma's eyes before," said Harrison, forty-four, a Democrat running to take Lindsey Graham's seat in the United States Senate. "She told me about this time when she was a little girl. She was playing in the house with her sisters and brothers, and all of a sudden her mom told them all to come to the one room in the middle and to shush, be quiet. She said she had never saw her mom that serious before.

"She said they sat there, and it was only probably a few minutes, but it felt like hours. And afterward she asked her, 'Mom, what was wrong?' And her mom said the KKK was marching down the

SHOT

Jaime Harrison, photographed in June in Columbia, South Carolina, where he lives with his wife, Marie, and their two children.

street with their torches, and she huddled them together. It was a pain that I saw in my grandma. It's that type of thing that is passed on from generation to generation. When I hear stories about the Orangeburg massacre—that's a pain that Black folks have been living with for generations."

On February 8, 1968, three Black students from South Carolina State University, one of two historically Black colleges in Orangeburg, were gunned down by state highway patrolmen for the crime of trying to desegregate a local bowling alley. The unarmed students had lit a bonfire on the edge of campus, and the police opened fire in the darkness. Twenty-eight people were wounded, including Cleveland Sellers, the father of future South Carolina state legislator and CNN pundit Bakari Sellers. Nine of the sixty-six patrolmen on the scene were brought to trial. All were acquitted. Only Cleveland Sellers went to prison, for "participating in a riot" outside the bowling alley. (He was pardoned a quarter century later.)

This is South Carolina, after all, the home office of American sedition, the place where secession was born. "Here is where treason began," declared a Union soldier under William Tecumseh Sherman, as his Army of the Tennessee prepared to march on the state, "and by God, here is where it shall end." Of course, the fight did not end. It just changed form. To provide for the maintenance of white supremacy, one side exchanged Confederate gray for Klan white and turned away from armed revolt and back toward working within the institutions of government. To impress upon Black citizens the iron reality of this new old order, they put up statues of their fallen leaders and ran up the bygone battle flag at the state capitol. And at night, the riders with their torches

"MY GOAL IS THAT FORTY YEARS FROM NOW, WHEN MY BOYS THEY'RE NOT HAVING THESE SAME

came, and people huddled in their kitchens, hushed their children, and hoped that the shadows would pass on by.

ONE WEEKEND LAST SEPTEMBER, THE CARS WERE lined up along U.S. 501 in the unincorporated town of Galivants Ferry, a bright little smudge on the map along the banks of the Little Pee Dee River. John C. Calhoun still stood tall on his one-hundred-foot pedestal down in Charleston, though the battle flag was gone from the capitol. It was so very long ago, September 2019, before impeachment hearings and sickness and uprisings in the streets. It was so very long ago, and there was still a presidential campaign that you could reach out and touch, and cheer and toast with Coca-Cola, or with something harder if you liked, and that campaign was coming on that bright September morning to Galivants Ferry. That's why the cars were lined up along 501, waiting to park amid the pecan trees.

For the first time, Democratic candidates for president were coming. Joe Biden, whose campaign was floundering. Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar and, yes, even Bill de Blasio. I wandered through the crowd, buttonholing voters and discovering a real taste for chicken bog, the local delicacy, a chicken, rice, and sausage concoction that can surely be eaten by the bucketful. I stood at a table sampling some. "It's good, isn't it?" asked a youngish, round-faced man. "Hello, I'm Jaime Harrison, and I'm running for Senate."

When it was time for him to speak, Harrison took his place behind the big wooden stump—and yes, there actually was a stump. "You know, growing up as a Democrat here in South Carolina, one of your bucket-list items is to get up and speak at this nice stump right here. And I want to thank the Holliday family for continuing this amazing and unique tradition here in South Carolina," he told the crowd. "For far too long, we have been silent in the face of hatred. We have been silent in the face of bigotry. Enough is enough."

The seat Harrison is running for was occupied for forty-eight years by Strom Thurmond, who'd run for president in 1948 in revolt against the civil-rights plank in the Democratic National Convention platform. But it wasn't just dark legacies that got Harrison into this race. He'd also had just about enough in 2018, while watching the red-faced, hysterical Yosemite Sam performance of Thurmond's successor, Lindsey Graham, in defense of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

"It was those hearings that really pushed me over, to be quite honest," Harrison said. "Not so much because I thought Graham shouldn't vote for Justice Kavanaugh. Listen, you can't be naive in this business. Lindsey Graham's a Republican, and the Republican president nominated somebody to be on the Supreme Court. Where I really had a problem was the treatment of Dr. Ford in that hearing."

Dr. Christine Blasey Ford had accused Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her in high school, and Kavanaugh had denied it. At the hearing to vet the allegation, Senate Repub-

licans brought in a special counsel, Rachel Mitchell. For Ford's testimony, Graham, like all Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee, ceded his time to Mitchell. But for Kavanaugh's testimony, when Graham's turn to question the nominee came around, he kept his time and used it to turn the hearing into a tribal war. "What you want to do is destroy this guy's life, hold this seat open, and hope you win in 2020," Graham shouted at the Democrats on the dais. "To my Republican colleagues, if you vote no, you're legitimizing the most despicable thing I have seen in my time in politics." From that point on, none of his Republican colleagues ceded their time to the special counsel so that she might actually investigate Ford's charges.

"It was all fake. It was all him performing for President Trump," Harrison said. "And one of the things I said was that we are suffering here in South Carolina. People literally are dying because they don't have health care, and this guy isn't lifting a finger. But because he's trying to rebuild his image in the eyes of the president, he will do and say anything."

For years, South Carolina Republicans had questioned their senator's conservative credentials. Lindsey Graham's politics make a chameleon look like a lump of coal. He made his bones as a member of the House during the impeachment of Bill Clinton, and was one of the House managers in the Senate trial. After four terms in Congress, he successfully ran for Senate, then morphed into one of John McCain's best friends and moderated his politics. When the Tea Party exposed the extremist roots that the party had been cultivating for thirty years, Graham found himself marked as a RINO. Still, he jumped into the 2016 Republican presidential primary, and throughout his own brief campaign and well into the general election, he excoriated Donald Trump more vigorously than almost any of his rivals did.

But not long after the unthinkable happened, Graham leaped aboard the Trump Train. By now, he's spent a little too long in the club car. There's Graham during the 2016 primaries, calling Trump a "jackass." Here's Graham, batting it around Bedminster with the jackass. There's Graham, mournfully declaiming Bill Clinton's high crimes and misdemeanors. Here's Graham, explaining that evidence of the president's attempt to get an ally to help him game his reelection is a hoax and a fraud and a waste of the Congress's time.

At the cost of growing national ridicule, Graham has restored his standing with the Republican rank and file in his home state, who seem to approve of his slow dance with the president. Graham has a formidable campaign war chest and is still raising money, although Harrison has fought him to at least a draw there. The Democrat is a national candidate, attracting money from people all over the country who'd very much like to see Graham gone. In this, parallels can be drawn between Harrison's campaign and the recent upstart efforts of people like Beto O'Rourke in Texas, Stacey Abrams in Georgia, and Andrew Gillum in Florida.

ARE MY AGE, CONVERSATIONS."

Of course, all three lost. Of course, none ran in 2020, the plague year, illuminated by the firelight of a civil-rights movement that rose again in this country as swiftly as the pandemic struck. The president's bungled and inhumane response to the latter development has transformed the campaign. By midsummer, South Carolina had a massive spike in confirmed COVID-19 cases, along with the state's first cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome, the condition associated with the novel coronavirus that afflicts children. The campaign is now also a referendum on a set of leaders on whose watch more than 130,000 Americans never made it to the Fourth of July.

HARRISON GREW UP POOR. HE GREW UP RURAL. "I'VE WORKED CORNFIELDS," he said. "I've picked butter beans, okra, watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew. I've butchered pigs, chickens. We made our own sausage and pudding." Soon after he was born, he and his mother, Patricia, moved in with her parents. One day, Patricia started showing up at Starflo, a local manufacturing plant; on her fourth trip, they finally hired her. "I was packing valves," she said. "Like the on-off for the water spigot. And I was the number-one packer in the plant. I was so happy I had a real job."

Harrison knew his father, who had another family across town from Jimmie Lou and Willie's house. "For the first few years, he would come around, like at Christmas, even after, when he met someone else and got married and had kids," Harrison said of his father. "I would see my half brothers from time to time. But when I was in fourth grade, he just went MIA. I didn't see them anymore."

At home, Harrison read voraciously—comic books at first, Marvel for preference. He and his grandfather watched the evening news every night, Brokaw for preference. (Willie was a laborer who built a number of the roads around Orangeburg, but who ultimately lost a leg to diabetes that he couldn't afford to control.) By the time Harrison got to Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School, he was an academic star. In eleventh grade, he was elected president of the local chapter of the National Honor Society. He summoned up the considerable brass to ask Representative James Clyburn to come to his induction. Curious, the newly elected congressman agreed, and when he got to Orangeburg, Harrison asked him for a job. "I detected something special in this young man," Clyburn said. "I mean, you got to respect him for his tenacity." Four years later, Harrison got an internship in the congressman's office.

In Clyburn, he'd found a guide and a mentor and a "political father." Harrison went on to Yale and then, after a year teaching back at his old high school, he enrolled in Georgetown Law School. In 2003, he joined Clyburn's staff. When Clyburn became House majority whip in 2007, Harrison rose with him, serving as floor director, a low-key but powerful legislative role. Harrison was there when the economy crashed in 2008, and when secretary of the Treasury Hank Paulson and Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke called the congressional leadership together one night and told them that if they didn't pass a massive bailout package, "we won't have an economy by Monday." Harrison helped whip the votes for the TARP bailout that eventually passed. "I had never seen a meeting with members of Congress from the leadership that were speechless," he said. "I mean, you could have heard a church mouse in that room."

That year, Harrison met Marie Boyd, a fellow lawyer from Utah. On their first date, Marie told Jaime about her home, and Jaime told her about Orangeburg and his grandparents. "We talked a lot about family traditions. We talked about things that are our family," said Boyd, who married Harrison in 2010. "In the course of that conversation, I really took away how much Jaime deeply cares about South Carolina and the issues that impact the lives of South Carolinians. So that's the first date."

After leaving Clyburn's staff, Harrison took a job with the lobbying shop run by Tony Podesta, the brother of former White House chief of staff John Podesta, a firm that made a cameo appearance in Robert Mueller's investigation into Paul Manafort. There, Harrison's clients included Walmart, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo. The latter two, of course, were beneficiaries of the TARP program. With the national Democratic party sliding left, this has been a red flag to some of the party's more dedicated southpaws. Against some attacks from the progressive left during this campaign, Harrison has argued that he doesn't need lectures from anyone about the problems of poverty.

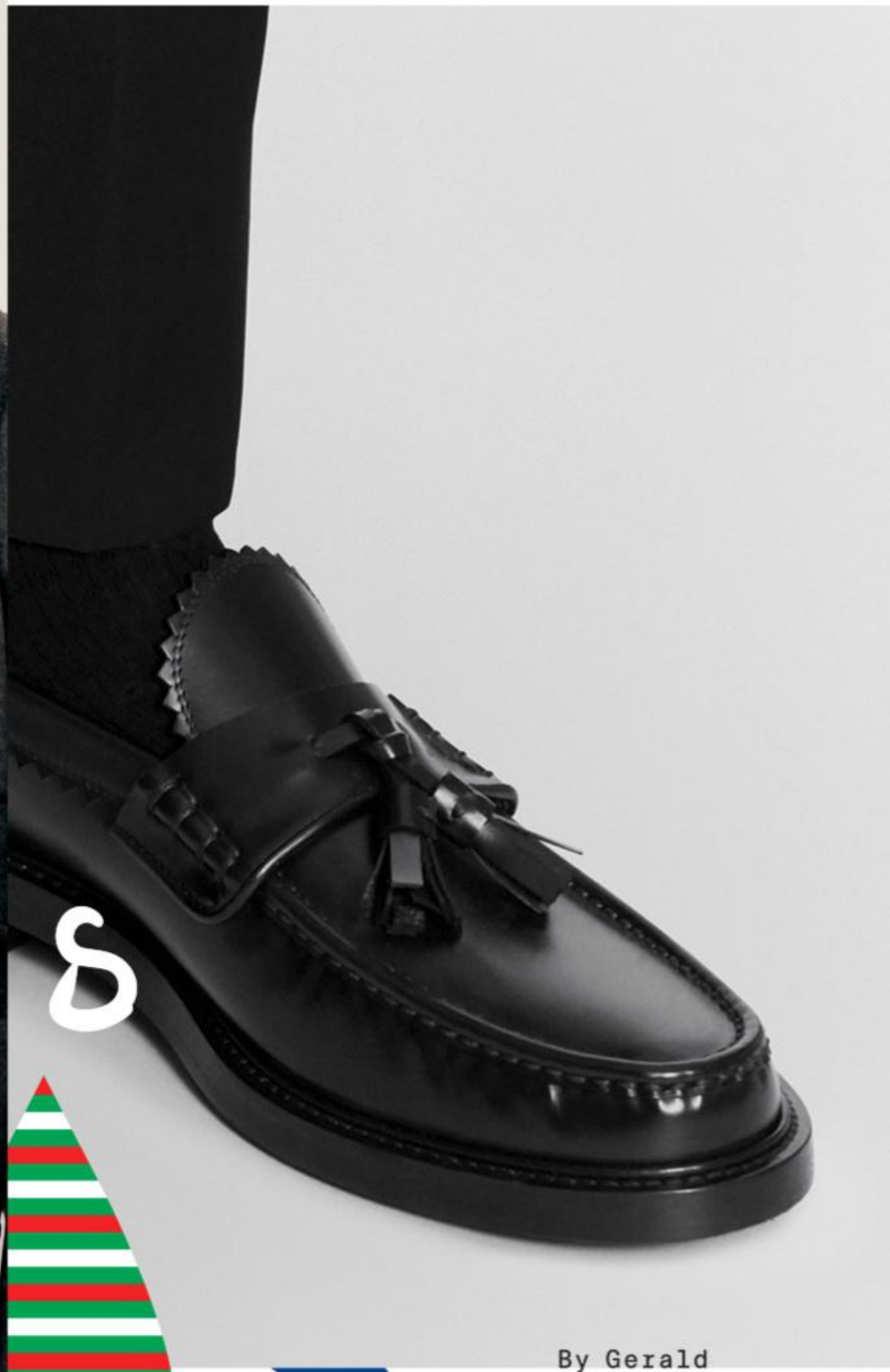
He won the election for chairman of the South Carolina Democratic party in 2013 and found himself thrust into the national spotlight two years later following the massacre at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston. Harrison did a number of TV interviews in which he tried to explain that South Carolina was changing, Dylann Roof's fanatic barbarism notwithstanding. He spoke emotionally about his ties to Clementa Pinckney, the senior pastor at Mother Emanuel and a state senator. And he wasted no time in demanding that the Confederate banner cease waving in front of the state capitol. "It's long past time for that flag to (continued on page 107)

MODA

With LV², VIRGIL ABLOH and NIGO filter Louis Vuitton's iconic design language through British style subculture to create the next evolution of streetwear

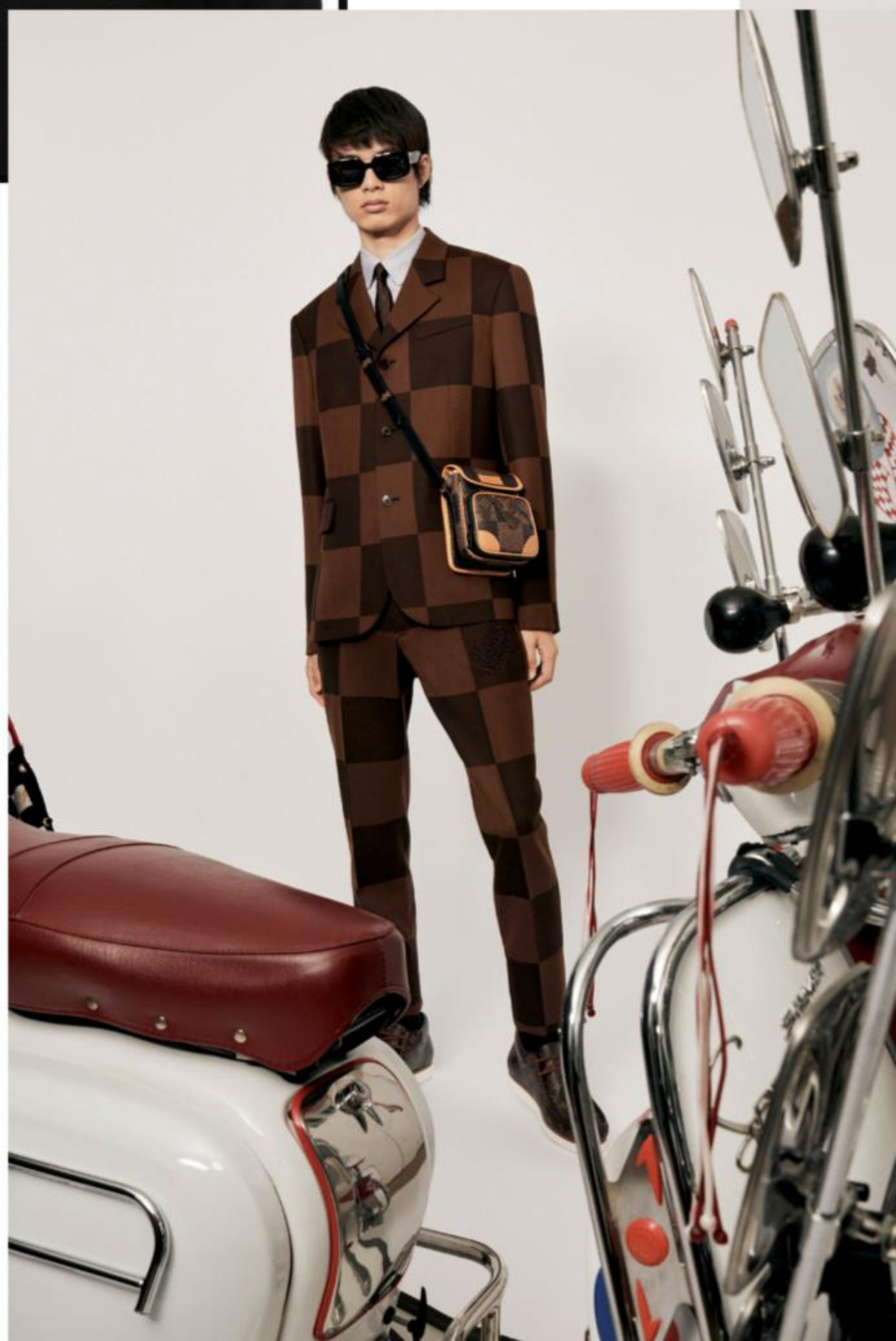
ALL CLOTHES, LOUIS VUITTON LV² COLLECTION BY VIRGIL ABLOH.

HERS



By Gerald Flores

COURTESY LOUIS VUITTON



LAST DECEMBER, VIRGIL ABLOH, THE MEN'S artistic director at Louis Vuitton, gave an interview to *Dazed* magazine that sparked a forest fire of debate in the fashion community. He predicted that streetwear would soon "die." Considering Abloh is one of the most prominent designers to blend traditional codes of streetwear—instantly recognizable graphics, hype-fueled exclusivity, a generally casual but thoroughly considered way of getting dressed—with high fashion, this was a big deal. The remark angered fans of both Abloh and his label Off-White, who consider themselves part of the streetwear community, and comment sections on Instagram overflowed with disbelief and vitriol.

He's since clarified those remarks, telling Esquire in March that the statement was meant as a provocation—a way to help prevent streetwear from becoming formulaic. And now he's putting those words into action. Alongside streetwear icon Nigo, founder of Bape and Human Made, Abloh is rolling out a collection called LV^2, which is a fresh spin on the style.

"This Nigo project is one of many that tell my narrative of what I believe in, and how I arrived at where I am," Abloh told me in June. The collection, informed by streetwear but rooted in the Mod aesthetic of the sixties, points to a confluence of youth-driven subcultures. "It's a way to evolve those ideas," he said.

The son of Ghanaian immigrants, Abloh grew up in Rockford, a city tucked in the northwest corner

JUSTIN RIDLER/HART & CO. (ABLOH). COURTESY LOUIS VUITTON (ALL OTHERS).

of Illinois, and studied architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. He met Kanye West in college and became his creative director. Then, in 2012, Abloh started Off-White, the label that would go on to put its spin on items ranging from Nike sneakers to Ikea furniture. In 2018, he ascended to the upper echelons of the fashion world when Louis Vuitton—one of the oldest fashion houses in Europe—named him men's artistic director.

The thirty-nine-year-old, who splits his time between Paris and Chicago, is focused on using his role to contribute to the global conversation about race. "The elephant in the room is that I'm a Black designer at the head of a Parisian fashion house," he said. "These next collections for me are going to be hallmarks in my career, in how I relate to the community at large."

Abloh is keenly aware of how he figures into a worldwide movement to address racial injustice, especially in an industry as infamously white-washed as fashion. "Because I'm the minority, I want to open up doors for others in the industry that look just like me, long after I continue on," he said. In July, he started the Post-Modern Scholarship Fund, raising at least $1 million for Black fashion students. Louis Vuitton was one of the main financial contributors to the new initiative, which provides money and mentorship for the next generation of Black designers.

Esquire spoke with Abloh in June, while he was in Chicago just before traveling to Paris to oversee Louis Vuitton's digital fashion show. The conversation has been lightly edited for space and clarity.

You've spoken a lot about using your platform to be a beacon for young creatives. Have the events surrounding George Floyd's death and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests made you look at that responsibility any differently?

Entirely. If you look at the catalog of my work, there's been a running theme of how Black people are portrayed in the industry. My voice will get louder, as the ecosystem is now in tune with recognizing the disparities in place.

I remember you saying you weren't even able to get into the Vuitton show in Paris more than a decade ago. On your journey to where you are now, was there a lot of diversity along the way?

I obviously wasn't seeing much diversity in those spaces, but I knew that once I was in a position of power that I could change that. That's what I've been doing with my career as a whole. I would categorize it as I was like an investigative reporter, if that makes sense? I'm from a Black community of designers and artists, and that community has been making headway in each of our own disciplines.

What I was doing was keeping an open mind and finding ways to circumvent, frankly, being the minority in an industry that I wanted to participate in. Essentially, we were comparing notes on how to do that. There's certain things you see when you're behind the curtain that inform the way you get to the goal at hand.

Let's dig into the LV² collection. Why'd you choose Nigo for your first collaboration at Louis Vuitton?

In the history of this kind of design, it's usually called, quote, unquote, "streetwear." I have a track record of rejecting that term, because it's often placed on Black designers instead of talking about fashion design as design, which usually doesn't have such categorizing terms. But in the realm of streetwear, the godfather comes from Japan. Nigo upended this idea that fashion couldn't also be casual, which is a very profound statement in terms of nudging the history of fashion design forward. I'm at Louis Vuitton carrying on the traditions that Nigo started, so I thought it was a great full-circle journey to bring in someone who made luxury approachable and youthful—all of those canons that I use in my work today—and do something so that he can create with the same platform I have.

You'd consider him a mentor?

Exactly. I first met him about fifteen years ago. Through his work, he taught us all a valuable role to carry through in terms of luxury. He was designing and offering sneakers and hoodies that had a super-big impact on my generation.

How do your individual approaches to design complement each other?

We have two different perspectives. I'm American. He's Japanese. We're both at interesting stages in our careers. His aesthetic is mature and so is mine, but maturing in different sorts of ways. We're still able to use our most valuable assets, which is just thinking and observing and translating that into design. Our collection reflects that.

Can you explain the direction you both decided to take this collab?

People would expect us to make streetwear, but instead we offered up a twist on the UK dandy, Mod culture, and tailoring, which is at the core of the collection. As casual as we get is in the denim pieces.

Do you see this as the next evolution or iteration of streetwear?

It's pushing the idea forward. We're in 2020. We've had a number of years where streetwear has taken hold. Nigo was doing this fifteen years ago. What makes us innovators in our own space is we're not riding the trend; we're dictating it. It's outputting something that's progressive for how that term *streetwear* is used.

TAKAMAYUMI (NIGO). COURTESY LOUIS VUITTON (ALL OTHERS).

AND NOW, A WORD FROM NIGO

This collection takes cues from Mod culture and London fashion in general. Why were those things a source of inspiration for you?

Mod style was a big inspiration and ongoing reference point for my craft, and the late eighties in London is also a recurring theme for me. It was the first youth culture based on concern for the concrete details of clothing: the precise cut of a pair of trousers, etc. For me, the basis of fashion is in that.

This is Virgil's first collaboration under Louis Vuitton. Why do you think he chose you as the first person to team up with?

I had experienced working with Louis Vuitton before, but at that time I only designed sunglasses. Virgil told me that he wanted me to do whatever I want, and since I've always loved LV, that was all I needed to hear. Virgil knows me so well, and Michael Burke, the CEO of the brand, is an old friend of mine, too. Working with two people who understand me so well was important.

Virgil says he's learned precision and generosity through working with you. Is there anything you've learned from him through your friendship that you apply to your own work?

I learned so much, and it was a really nice experience, with generosity and exchange at the core of it all. From June, we had meetings every month in Paris, and we also talked on Skype and on text message.

Are your and Virgil's approaches to design different? How do you complement each other?

For this collaboration specifically, we really aligned on the same vision of playfulness around Louis Vuitton's codes and DNA. Louis Vuitton's patterns are so complete that they become the cornerstone of all creativity, so we approached it by changing the design of the font and size and combining it with the Monogram and the iconic Damier.

Virgil credits you with coming up with the name LV^2. What's the background and the idea behind that label?

It stands for "Louis Vuitton Louis Vuitton." Louis Vuitton as interpreted in the thoughts of two people. A Louis Vuitton that's different from Louis Vuitton.

THE OUTSIDERS

We outfitted some of the sharpest guys we know in fall's finest and photographed them in their own backyards,

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL GENTLE_STYLING BY NICK SULLIVAN

QUETZAL SAUNDERS, 44
Artist, designer, builder, pioneer
@birdsnakes

Jacket, shirt ($1,070), trousers ($1,150), shoes ($1,050), and tie ($215) by LOUIS VUITTON MEN'S.

gardens, driveways, garages, and rooftops. Because it feels good to get dressed right now. No matter where you are.

ARMANDO CABRAL, 38
Founder and creative director, Armando Cabral Shoes; model // @armando_cabral

Coat ($2,645), turtleneck ($745), shirt ($595), trousers ($945), and tie ($185) by DOLCE & GABBANA; boots ($595) by AQUATALIA.

JASON "PATTERNPAPI" KUSIMO, 28
Tailor, men's fashion content creator, Twitch streamer // @pattern.papi

Coat ($6,300), jacket ($3,000), turtleneck ($3,100), trousers ($850), and loafers ($1,400) by DIOR MEN.

MAX POGLIA, 39
Brand owner; creative director; designer, Poglia knives and leather goods // @maxpoglia

Coat ($3,975) and trousers ($950) by VERSACE; sweater ($238) by BOSS; boots ($1,095) by TOD'S; hat and glasses, his own.

TAKASHI YAMADA, 49
Fabric guy, surfer, runner, sometime model
@takashiyamada0926

Suit ($3,495) and turtleneck by ERMENEGILDO ZEGNA; sandals, his own.

TOURÉ, 49 (with his son, Hendrix)
Writer, podcaster, TV host
@toureshow

Coat ($1,255) by HERON PRESTON; shirt ($780) by HERMÈS; trousers ($830) by SALVATORE FERRAGAMO; shoes ($495) by MR P.; tie ($150) by ALEXANDER OLCH.

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI, 27
All-around creative, clothing designer,
student of marine life,
aspiring music photographer
@robertorossellini

Jacket ($2,300), shirt ($1,100), trousers ($770),
and scarf ($550), CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE;
boots ($1,250) by GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI.

SEBASTIÃO HUNGERBÜHLER, 23
Multidisciplinary designer // @seb.astiao

Jacket ($3,600), shirt ($580), trousers ($1,100), and loafers ($850) by GUCCI; socks ($18) by LONDON SOCK COMPANY.

ROZE TRAORE, 28
Private chef // @rozetraore

Coat ($3,400), shirt ($735), trousers ($1,120), and tie ($215) by PRADA; shoes, stylist's own.

FOR STORE INFORMATION SEE PAGE 107.

JOSEPH FALCONE, 34
Surfboard maker, barber
@jw_falcone

Jacket ($4,275) and trousers ($840) by HERMÈS; T-shirt and shoes, his own.

Seven Mayors, Three Crises, One Text Thread

A brotherhood of Black mayors, mostly from the South, talk to one another on a group chat. As COVID-19, a cratering economy, and mass demonstrations sweep the nation, they're finding that these conversations are a lifeline.

by JACK HOLMES *Photograph by* CARLTON DAVIS

Freedom

"YOU SEE HOW NICE THE OFFICE IS IN MONTGOMERY?" ASKED Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the mayor of Jackson, Mississippi. "You see that? They gave him the Oval Office in Montgomery. You're on mute, Steve."

That's Steven Reed, the mayor of Montgomery, Alabama, whom Lumumba was busy ribbing over Zoom. Reed was not the first to catch some light heat as we waited for the rest of the cohort to get on the call. Mayor Levar Stoney of Richmond, Virginia, was informed moments earlier that he could use a visit to the barbershop. "From my first campaign to my second one, I looked at my old pictures," Lumumba added by way of consolation, "and I wouldn't have voted for me."

He's got jokes, but Lumumba is also, as Mayor Frank Scott of Little Rock, Arkansas, would later say, "the scholar of our group." The group in question is an extraordinary one: a network of young Black men—most in their thirties, some in their forties—who serve as mayors of cities across the country, and act as friends and sounding boards to one another. Few mayors in this nation's 244 years have been hit with the gale forces of history quite like these men have, and the fact is that there are only so many mayors to talk to in the first place. It's a smaller group still who know what it means to be both a mayor right now and a Black man in America always.

They've had the odd phone call through the three crises facing us all—the coronavirus pandemic, the accompanying economic turmoil, and the massive movement for racial justice following the killing of George Floyd by officers of the Minneapolis Police Department—but they primarily operate via text. They've got a group chat going, and that's where they say they turn whenever they're stumped, need advice, or want to hear a voice that doesn't have an interest in their local city politics. Sometimes they just need a laugh.

Seven of the mayors in the group were represented here, all from the South except for Quinton Lucas of Kansas City, Missouri, aka "Mayor Q." Many of the others now lead cities that once served as capitals in the Confederate States of America. They mostly met through the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative and other mayoral conferences. Reed, forty-six, is Montgomery's first Black mayor; Lumumba, of Jackson, is thirty-seven; Richmond's Stoney is thirty-nine; and Scott, thirty-six, is Little Rock's first Black mayor. There was also Adrian Perkins, mayor of Shreveport, Louisiana, who's thirty-four, and Randall Woodfin, of Birmingham, Alabama, thirty-nine.

They have separate threads going with Keisha Lance Bottoms, LaToya Cantrell, and Sharon Weston Broome—the Black women mayors of Atlanta, New Orleans, and Baton Rouge, respectively—but "this fraternity has been really helpful to me on a personal note," Lumumba said about the group of male mayors. "My father was mayor" of Jackson, he continued, referring to Chokwe Lumumba, who took his last name from the Congolese independence leader who was assassinated with Western involvement. "[My father] died in office, and I often wonder how he would've handled things. And so just being able to bounce things off like-minded people in similar circumstances, it's just a unique thing."

"As one of the newer members," said Perkins, the youngest of the group, "I can attest that as soon as I was elected, I could reach out to each and every one of you and you were all there for me."

"That's my same experience," said Lucas, whose occasional snark can land a beat late behind his dry, declaratory tone. "I went to the U. S. Conference of Mayors this year, which was pretty much my last time out of town. I met everybody and got linked from there. You know, I'm remembering y'all because I don't get any vacations anymore."

Back in March, Esquire planned to meet with the group over shrimp at Orlandeaux's, a Shreveport spot that claims the title of oldest continuously operating Black-owned restaurant in the United States, to talk about the newly elected mayors' experiences. But then COVID-19 went from over there to right here seemingly overnight, and it was tough for any mayor to leave town. We moved our dinner party to an afternoon Zoom. There was, regrettably, no shrimp.

"I'VE BEEN TO WAR THREE TIMES," SAID MAYOR PERKINS OF Shreveport. "I've been to Iraq, Afghanistan, and these last couple months have been the hardest thing that I've ever had to do in my life. Because we're juggling three crises. And all of that to your constituents is life and death.

"Our governor just announced on Monday [June 22] that we're not going to Phase Three, as we're starting to see an uptick of the virus again. Before, I could focus on the demonstrations, because the virus spread was slowing. Now I'm having to adjust gears again and start dealing with the virus."

"For us, our protests were relatively peaceful," said Reed of Montgomery. A former probate judge with an M.B.A. from Vanderbilt, he's got a bit more of an introvert's demeanor. He's not quiet, necessarily, just considered when he speaks. "They were purposeful and passionate. I didn't have some of the challenges that some of these brothers had in their cities," he added, referring to, for one, the vandalism in downtown Birmingham the last weekend of May. Montgomery's most pressing problem was the novel coronavirus. Alabama, like many southern states, was in the middle of a June surge when we spoke. Eighty-two percent of the state's ICU beds were already full. The shortage had long been a looming threat in Reed's jurisdiction, which, like many cities represented here, is also charged with providing services to the surrounding region.

QUINTON LUCAS, 36, Kansas City, Missouri

CHOKWE ANTAR LUMUMBA, 37, Jackson, Mississippi

ADRIAN PERKINS, 34, Shreveport, Louisiana

STEVEN REED, 46, Montgomery, Alabama

FRANK SCOTT, 36, Little Rock, Arkansas

LEVAR STONEY, 39, Richmond, Virginia

RANDALL WOODFIN, 39, Birmingham, Alabama

The pandemic mapped onto existing inequities. Seventy-two percent of people testing positive for COVID-19 in Montgomery are Black, Reed said. Ninety percent of people who are placed on ventilators are Black. It was similar in Shreveport. At one point in time in Caddo Parish, where the population is 50 percent Black, 80 percent of COVID deaths were Black people. The disparities extended to who picked up the virus in the first place, too.

When the pandemic hit in earnest, every mayor in America was slammed with a revolving door of decisions. Go into lockdown? When? Can you trust the leader of your state to choose public health over politics? Does the governor have the president in his or her ear saying the cases will soon go to zero? How can you get hold of some test kits? Who needs them first? And how are you going to get your nurses out of trash bags? "We just had a thread going back and forth, because of how fast everything was occurring," Perkins said. "We just fell back on each other, to really rely on each other."

COVID-19 is a global disease that operates locally, and mayors have been pressed into service defending their patch against a plague that brought the whole world to its knees. "It can feel just a little bit lonely when you have no one else here who's going through the same thing inside your city," said Stoney of Richmond, describing mayoral life but also, perhaps, his slice of the collective isolation of this charming era. To complicate things further, mayors don't always have the authority to take every action they might want to. Particularly in the Deep South, some cities do not have "home rule," meaning they aren't free to make their own decisions on budgets and more. "In southern states, the power is concentrated in the legislature," Reed explained.

"I've been to war three times, and these last couple months have

"What we're running into is cities that are primarily led by people of color that are being dictated to by overwhelmingly white and rural lawmakers."

Sometimes the mayors rely on Republican attorneys general to issue favorable opinions that will allow them to take the actions they feel they need to take, and often those AGs will weigh in with feedback that is more political than legal. "I had an interaction with my AG when Donald Trump came to visit a sister city," Perkins said by way of example. "He never even stepped foot in Shreveport. And I wouldn't allow our police officers to go to this campaign event. And our AG was tweeting at me saying, 'Hey, if you want to learn about the law, I'll teach you.' "

Everyone shook their head knowingly. "*Mmph!*" Stoney murmured.

"Yeah, I know, right?"

"Adrian," Stoney said a few moments later, "didn't you go to Harvard?"

"Something like that, yeah," Perkins said. "Clearly, I got a poor education according to my state AG, who spelled Louisiana wrong in his campaign commercial."

I asked whether, as Black Democratic mayors of predominantly Black cities, they feel Republican state officials see them as easy targets for scoring points.

"One hundred percent," Perkins said. "There's nothing in it for him to lose, you know? The rhetoric that he has espoused—he's a replication of our president, and a lot of our state officials are very similar."

When Mayor Q went to vote in Kansas City earlier this year, he was turned away from his regular polling place on the basis that they couldn't find him on the rolls. He left without voting. It eventually turned out to be an administrative mix-up that was rectified that day, but most citizens aren't the mayor and might not go back later to vote, as he did. "A few hours later," Lucas told me, "the Republican secretary of state in my state, a gentleman by the name of Jay Ashcroft—who makes his father, John, look like Nelson Mandela—said, 'This was all a stunt and Lucas should've just waited.' I actually took it personally, because that's what they tell our people all the time, right? You should've waited longer; you should comply better with the police. You should do something, even though you were the one who actually was inconvenienced. You need to just be a little more patient. If you complied a little bit better, everything would've worked out."

"Here in Birmingham, we wanted to do a shelter-in-place order," said Mayor Woodfin, who eschewed the coat-and-tie uniform for a green tee under a blazer and a pocket square to match. He triumphed over seven-year incumbent William Bell in 2017 with the help of Bernie Sanders and Our Revolution. "We did that prior to the state doing it, and I remember the calls I would see from the governor's office, the AG's office, and letters telling us we couldn't do that. I was like, 'Listen, I have a law degree just like y'all; I wouldn't recommend something that I couldn't do.' "

Sometimes it's less a Trumpified governor than the fool next door. The disdain for expertise runs deep in this country, and while the eggheads have made their mistakes, folk science from Facebook usually proves a poor substitute. When Mayor Reed pushed for an ordinance mandating masks in Montgomery during the pandemic, he brought it to the city council, which heard testimony from a procession of doctors at local hospitals before a vote one night in June. Even after they presented evidence of the efficacy of face coverings and how bad the situation had become in the city's ICUs, the measure stalled, 4–4. One councilman, Brantley Lyons, questioned whether masks and social-distancing measures work and started talking about constitutional rights, prompting calls from doctors in the audience for him to visit a hospital sometime. Reed mandated masks by executive order the next morning.

I asked him whether the vote, in which just one of the council's five white members voted to mandate masks, had anything to do with how the pandemic was playing out on the ground, landing more heavily on nonwhite communities.

"Absolutely," he said. "I think that that's why representation is so important. . . . I think for some of the white council members, maybe their lack of interaction with Black people in this city played a role. Because far too often, when issues hit the Black community, there can be a delayed response, because there's almost a [need for] justification—of why.

"I had a city council member who, when we were seeing the COVID cases come in, implied that the numbers were so high because they were coming from certain apartment complexes. The places where all these people live on top of one another. Maybe that's true, maybe it's not. What does that have to do with us as leaders addressing the issue? Because many of the frontline workers, many of the people who we celebrated, are living in those apartment complexes. They're the people who are in the pharmacies, they're in the grocery stores, they're in the convenience stores, they're running our public transit, they're in the warehouses, they're in childcare and social services. Maybe they don't have the ability to have a nice house in this subdivision or this suburb."

IN JUNE, THE R&B ARTIST TREY SONGZ, WHO WAS BORN JUST south of Richmond, called for Mayor Stoney to step down. His call came after Stoney's appointment of William "Jody" Blackwell as the city's interim police chief. Blackwell, it soon surfaced, was the subject of a fatal-shooting investigation in 2002. (No charges were brought.) Stoney says he never exactly expected to face the ire of a singer-songwriter, but he does understand. It was the culmination of a tumultuous period for the mayor, which began with him forcing out the prior chief, William Smith, not long after Richmond police tear-gassed peaceful protesters holding a vigil at the monument to Robert E. Lee within the city limits. "We violated [the social] contract," Stoney told a rally crowd the next day, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported. He was greeted with jeers. That night, he marched with protesters to the Lee statue, which he now calls "the granddaddy of them all."

On the Zoom call, I asked the mayors which of them had Confederate monuments in their cities. The answer was everyone but Mayor Q. (He did offer that there was a movement under way in Kansas City to remove from some public works the name of a real-estate developer whose legacy is tied to redlining, a bit of structural racism more closely associated with northern cities like Chicago.) "I have the Andrew Jackson monument, hence my city is named after Andrew Jackson, too," Lumumba said, referring to the seventh president of the United States, whose record as a slaver and genocidaire the country is beginning to come to grips with. "We're thinking about changing it to Mahalia Jackson, Mississippi," he said, grinning. "We don't have to change the signage of anything."

These monuments, often constructed decades after Appomattox in periods when white supremacy sought to reassert itself through law and terror, are vessels for an almighty lie: Confederate leaders weren't heroes but traitors to the United States. By all means, teach the history, and place the statues in museums with proper historical context. But Robert E. Lee has no right to tower over Richmond as he currently does.

It's not always as simple as issuing an executive order, however, or even passing a city council resolution. Again, the lack of home rule and local control looms large. "Here in Little Rock, we actually got two monuments at the state capitol, but like many other cities, that's a different jurisdiction," said Mayor Scott, a tight-end-turned-pastor who wraps up most correspondence with "I appreciate ya." He intimated that it will be up to the Arkansas legislature to pull them down. "But last Thursday, around 4:00 in the morning—trying to be a little bit discreet—we took down our Confederate monument." That one, a lone soldier erected in downtown Little Rock's MacArthur Park during the Jim Crow era, was within his jurisdiction.

"Even though we own our parks, we manage our parks, we fund our parks, and it's city property," Mayor Woodfin of Birmingham said, lamenting the power of the Alabama legislature, "they created a law that says we can't take down statues, even though those statues are on our property."

"The other problem that I have," said Lumumba, "is that my Andrew Jackson statue—we own city hall, but the Masons still own space inside it."

"What?" Scott asked, chuckling incredulously. He wasn't the only one.

"Yeah," Lumumba said, smiling himself. "I'd like another city hall. Now I know, looking at Reed's background, what my office would look like once we buy our own.

been the hardest thing that I've ever had to do in my life." –ADRIAN PERKINS *"We're Black mayors. We're Black men first." – QUINTON LUCAS*

SEVEN MAYORS, THREE CRISES, ONE TEXT THREAD

"We're trying to put a statue of Medgar Evers there," Lumumba added, referring to the Jackson civil-rights activist gunned down in 1963 by a member of the Ku Klux Klan. "That's who we want out of ours." In fact, in July the city council voted to remove the Andrew Jackson statue.

Talk of process and jurisdiction doesn't quite land with every constituent, however, many of whom are done with being told, in Mayor Q's words, "to just be a little more patient." To compound the issue, folks who have been locked out of the systems of democracy now have to learn where all the levers and pulleys are in the machine. It's a problem of political communication that extends to these mayors' efforts to reform their systems of policing. "Our residents have a hard time understanding that sometimes," Stoney said, "because they expect their mayors to be, I guess you could say, all-powerful and strong."

"Yes, mayors get to appoint police chiefs," Perkins added. "But a step further you have to take is realizing how much power your civil-service board has to put in place whatever policies, whatever cultural changes you want to implement. They can reinstate officers that you want to terminate; they can completely shoot down any punishment that you want to administer." (Perkins has made a dent where he can, though. In one of his first acts in office, he signed a repeal of Shreveport's so-called "sagging pants law," a 2007 ordinance that yielded 726 arrests, 96 percent of which were of Black men.)

"Chokwe," Perkins asked, "what about the tweets you got about you being the mayor of Mississippi?"

"Oh, yeah," Lumumba said with a grin. "When there was a lot of focus, and necessarily so, on the uprisings in the prisons in Mississippi and the deaths that were associated, people were hitting my social media and asking me what was I gonna do about my prisons. I don't have a prison. The one that they're talking about is two hours away. I tried to explain this, and somebody said, 'How can't you deal with it? You're the mayor of Mississippi.' And I said, 'Oh, I didn't know.' "

But beneath the laughs, there is a real tension in play: These are mayors of relatively large cities, tasked with overseeing police forces, but they are also Black men in America. "I have vivid memories of being pulled over for driving while Black, of being profiled for the type of car I drove," said Woodfin. "So many times that I knew what to do. I knew to turn my car off before the police came up to my car. I knew to have my window down before the police came to my car. I knew that I already had my wallet out so I wouldn't have to reach for nothing before the police came to my car. I knew to have my hands on the steering wheel before the police came to the car, turn my music off before the police came to the car. I got to that position because I was being pulled over that many times for driving while Black."

"We're Black mayors. We're Black men first," said Lucas. "We've been told we fit the description; we've been told to put our hands on the hood. We've been called the *n*-word. My sister lives in Texarkana, and she works in Shreveport"—Mayor Perkins loved to hear it—"and I went down to pick up my niece for the summer, to bring her back up to Kansas City with her grandma. And y'all know this, the fear you have. I'm a Black mayor; I got all these fancy things and all that. I'm just trying not to get stopped in Arkansas. I was like, 'I might even know the mayor of the biggest city in Arkansas, and that don't make a difference.' "

THE GEARS ARE GRINDING INTO MOTION. Stoney, beset on all sides for a time by the public he serves, is moving swiftly to institute a system for deploying mental-health professionals as the first responders in certain situations rather than police. He's working to establish an independent civilian review board to oversee the Richmond force. The interim chief who attracted Trey Songz's attention has a permanent replacement in Gerald Smith.

Mayor Perkins has put in place regular implicit-bias training in Shreveport along with a ban on choke holds, and his administration has built a website for residents to track progress and hold him accountable. Mayor Scott rolled out his ACT plan—"accountable, clear, and transparent"—which includes a "duty to intervene" policy, requiring Little Rock officers to stop their colleagues from using excessive force.

"Defund the Police," though, is where the rubber meets the road. Just before I asked about it, Stoney and Reed said they had to hop off the call, the latter announcing he had a meeting next door. I put the question to those who remained: What comes to mind when they hear that term?

"That's not what you really mean," Scott said simply.

"The 'defund police' campaign in the city of Minneapolis actually started before George Floyd," Woodfin said. "With the city of Birmingham, there's a similarity, and then there's an extreme opposite. The similarity is that they have about 890 officers. We have about 905. But Birmingham's police budget is $90 million. The Minneapolis police budget is $193 million. In the city of Minneapolis, when they say 'defund the police,' I actually think they mean that. I think it's a literal conversation that they're having. Ninety-four percent of our $90 million budget goes to personnel costs, meaning if I take any money away, that also means I'm firing police officers, and that's just not realistic. The notion that we should be doing more things towards social services, I agree with. The notion that maybe certain calls, like if there's a loose dog, maybe an armed police officer shouldn't show up—I actually agree with that, too. But I think we have to be very realistic in this conversation."

"Thirty-five, 45, maybe even 50 percent of our budgets are public safety—our police department and our fire department," Scott added. "Within those budgets, somewhere between 70, 85 percent of said budgets are personnel, and so when we hear from a mayoral perspective 'defund the police,' that means that when someone calls 911, we can't send someone to you. It's a catchy marketing phrase, but it has detrimental effects if you actually go forward and do it. What we should be calling for is realigning dollars. Reallocation."

"When you strip our jobs down, mayors are responsible for two things," Woodfin said, "public safety and public infrastructure. The reason why our police departments and our fire departments make up the biggest [share of] public works is because no one else is responsible for those things. We think of social services, it's more of a shared job. It's not just a city's tax dollars. It's nonprofits, it's the state, it's the federal government, it's grants, it's churches, and it's private sector."

"And Rand," said Perkins, "I'm saying the same thing. I have pennies to throw at the problem with those social services, and that's why I'm saying, if you really want to have an impact, you can't rely on that, considering how our budgets are structured and the responsibility that's laid out in our city charters."

"And for the record," Woodfin added, "the emails all of us have been getting from Sydney, Australia, and Canada and these European countries about 'defund our police' don't match what's on the ground, with Big Mama saying, 'I want more police.' It literally doesn't match."

"I think about what Big Mama's talking about," Lumumba said. "I think about what Ms. Jones is talking about down the street, and the reality in my city is the majority of my police force looks like them, right? So when somebody breaks into their house, they want somebody there. They aren't talking about defunding the police, because they're the ones that often feel the brunt of crime more than anybody, right?"

Maybe it's more than rubber-meets-road. It's an outright collision of soaring ideals and the harsh realities of running a city every day, of personal experience and public duty. These men want to break the school-to-prison pipeline, but they're also expected to stop real crime, right now. As the pandemic rages, they'll have to find a way to get their constituents access to health care. But they also want to get them access to capital. "It's a moment that lends itself to rising to the occasion," Lumumba said at another point, "and demanding things that we've never seen."

That's a lot to tackle over Zoom. Throw it on the text thread.

THE LONG SHOT

(continued from page 85)

come down," he said at the time. "I understand that a lot of folks feel that it's their heritage, but that flag symbolizes a lot of negative."

He ran for national chair of the Democratic National Committee in 2017 but dropped out of the race and gave his support to Tom Perez, Barack Obama's labor secretary, who in turn appointed Harrison to a senior position at the DNC. Harrison was following the well-trod career path of a Clinton-Obama-era Democrat.

As a Senate candidate, he hasn't strayed too far from that lane. His health-care proposal is about lowering costs, but there's nothing there about Medicare for All. There is no mention of a Green New Deal in his environmental plan, but he wants to rebuild and strengthen South Carolina's infrastructure against the climate crisis and its inevitable consequences.

He was set up to be a perfect Biden Democrat—in February, anyway. And it might've worked, though odds are that it wouldn't have.

But those considerations are out the window. He's still running against Lindsey Graham, but now he's doing so the way the rest of us have been shopping and meeting and living in this strange aquarium existence. The interviews for this story were conducted by Zoom, and so are his fundraising events. He's been quarantining for months with Boyd and their two young children, and he plans to continue for the foreseeable future. He's improvising campaign strategy on the fly.

"To campaign in the South is a unique cultural experience," he said. "You go into the little church facilities and meet people, or you go to a spaghetti supper, and it's about talking and hugging and shaking hands. It's hard not to be able to do that now. There's really no playbook for this." And at the same time, the country is in the middle of a social and political upheaval unlike any it's seen since the embers cooled in Watts, and Newark, and Detroit in the mid-sixties. Every issue on which the campaign once turned has been freighted with medical peril and historical baggage. There have been so many false dawns already. Nobody wants to hear "never again" again. When a Minneapolis cop smothered George Floyd against the asphalt, all the bills came due in a hurry once more. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks. A cry this time for a real dawn, or a plunge into deeper darkness.

"I really feel as though we're at a crossroads," Harrison said. "The types of reactions, but also the diversity that I see in terms of the response. Normally, it's mostly Black folks out marching, or it's mostly Black folks talking about these issues. But for the first time really in my lifetime, I see folks saying, 'You know what, let me carry some of this weight also. I may not be Black, I may not understand what you're going through—the difficulty in terms of raising a Black child, or losing a child—but I hear your pain, I appreciate what you're going through, and I want to help.' My goal is that forty years from now, when my boys are my age, they're not having these same conversations."

THERE WAS A STIRRING OF SOMETHING that day at the Galivants Ferry Stump, 143 years since the first gathering by that name. The inaugural Stump was held in 1876, during what was quite possibly the dirtiest and most consequential election in American history. The event was arranged on behalf of Wade Hampton III, a former Confederate general and the scion of one of the biggest slaveholding families in the state. The white nation's zeal for Reconstruction was fading before the noisy onslaught of the Gilded Age. The national election between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden was razor-close. All over the South, so-called Redeemers waged war and terror on newly enfranchised Black voters, and nobody waged a harder and dirtier campaign than Wade Hampton. After a massacre of Black residents in the town of Hamburg, Hampton blamed Reconstruction for having ignited a "race war." As part of his campaign, which he ran out of a Charleston brothel, Hampton arranged with the Holliday family to put on a political event hard by the Little Pee Dee River, and the Galivants Ferry Stump was born.

The election ended with Hampton installed as governor, because when a special commission in Washington settled the presidential election in favor of Hayes, the price for that deal was the withdrawal of federal troops from the South and the de facto end of Reconstruction.

So there was a remarkable bit of historical English on the way events had spun forward to have Jaime Harrison, a Black son of a teenage mother who'd grown up in poverty in Orangeburg, talking at an event that had been born of pure, undiluted white supremacy. It was something beyond mere irony. There was a kind of Newtonian physics to what was happening: At long last, an equal and opposite force had been brought to bear.

Harrison felt it, too. "It's amazing, because you see the entire political evolution of the South," he told me as the afternoon softened into evening. "Like I say, when you understand history, you can make history. When this thing started, the idea of somebody like me up there speaking on that stump?"

I cracked wise that when Harrison was earlier embraced onstage by former state senator John Land, a white man in a big straw hat whom Mark Twain would have hired as a local consultant on the spot, old Wade Hampton III, down in the burial ground of the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Columbia, probably began revolving at a considerable rate. The sun fell gently behind the pecan trees and over the river.

"Good," Jaime Harrison told me. "I hope he's spinning."

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THE ESQUIRE EDITORIAL BOARD ENDORSES Transition lenses

FOUR MINUTES and forty-nine seconds into what would become a several-hours-long binge of Padma Lakshmi's new Hulu show, *Taste the Nation,* life as we knew it changed. No kidding. Changed! Our host was strolling down a small street in El Paso, Texas, when she paused and popped inside local outpost Jalisco Cafe for a meal. As she ordered a bean burrito, we watched as her previously violet shades began to fade. By the time her food arrived, the lenses were clear. *Transition lenses are fucking sick,* the high poets sang.

Wait a minute. Transition lenses? Sartorial staple of the aggressively anti-fashion? Official accessory of high school math teachers? Yes, those. Free yourself from the idea that transitions are the facial equivalent of a cell-phone holster and a whole world of conveniences will open up before you. You'll never have to take off your sunglasses, for one. Ever. Never realize, while taking off your sunnies, that you forgot your case and now must shove your unprotected eyewear into a pocket or bag to await their inevitable smashing, for another. Risking the itch of contacts just to be able to wear shades will be a faint memory.

Now, we know what you're thinking. We know because it also occurred to us, but the answer is no, you do not need to apologize to your mother* or your grandfather or your Algebra II teacher for years spent mocking their eyewear. That's because they weren't doing it right. To make transition lenses work, the frame must be just so. The shape has to look cool as hell while tinted outside but not like weird-as-hell seventies bifocals once clear inside. We recommend a lightweight, unimposing aviator. They can't appear to be trying too hard, weighed down with a heavy tortoiseshell design or otherwise gauche embellishment.

Truly, transition lenses are about carrying on with an enviable leisure. They are an attitude—a lifestyle. They are simplicity itself; they make nonsense a thing of the past. Friendly passersby will see you at lunch—outdoors on a partly shaded patio, which in our past lives existed as a battleground in the sunglasses-on-or-sunglasses-off debate—shades in mid-tint, drink in hand, and do you know what they'll think? *Transition lenses are fucking sick.*

**There is one exception.*
If your mother is Padma Lakshmi,
you do, in fact, have to tell
her you were wrong. Dead wrong.

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